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A Short Story Magazine

May, 1916 Ten Cents

30 Seconds of Darkness

by

Harry Stephen Keeler

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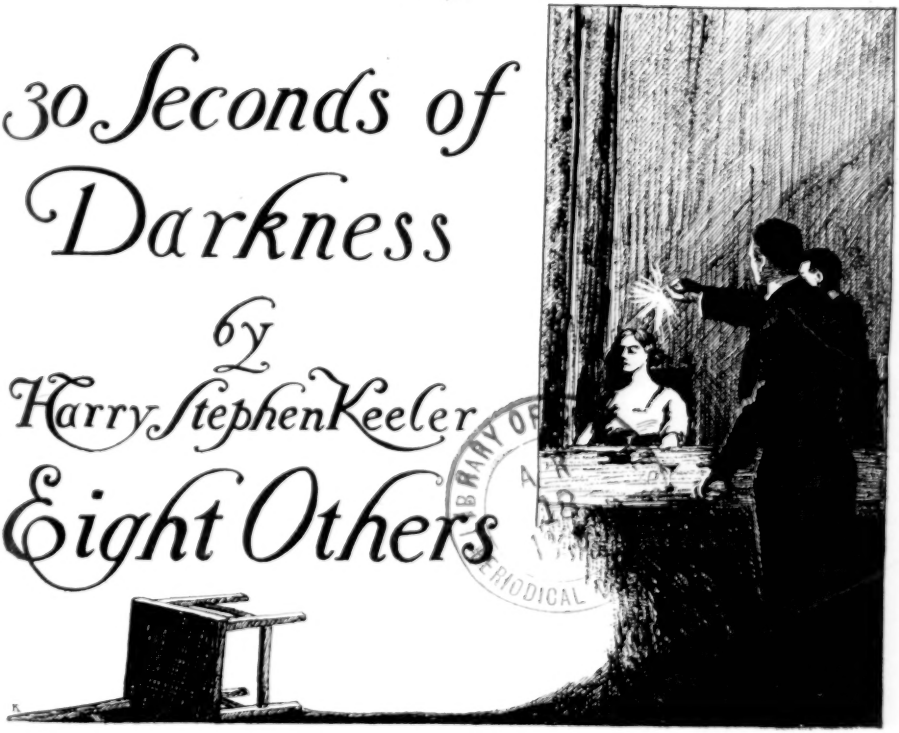

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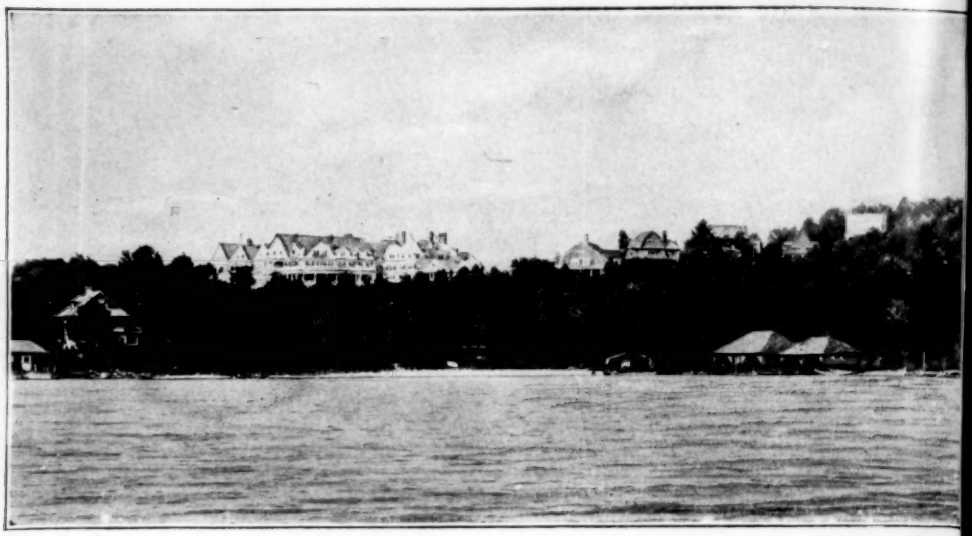

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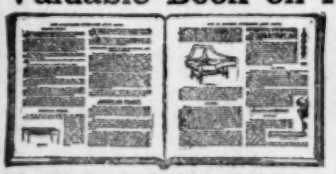

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Thirty Seconds of Darkness

BY HARRY STEPHEN KEELER

(THE ADVENTURE OF THE CORDOVA NECKLACE)

"TOMORROW evening, my dear T. B.," DeLancey suddenly remarked, "I intend to be the cause of a little excitement at old Garrard Bascom's dinner party. In simpler language, my dear fellow, I propose to steal the Countess of Cordova's $100,000 diamond necklace. What do you think of the project?"

With surprise I stiffened up suddenly in my chair. My newspaper dropped from my fingers and I stared unbelievingly at the immaculately clad figure that was seated across from me. But his pair of brown eyes returned my gaze unflinchingly.

"Do you mean to assert, DeLancy," I managed finally to ask, "that you intend to try such a feat as that at a dinner table surrounded by thirty or more people—and the usual two or three Pinkerton detectives present?"

"Precisely," he smiled, blowing a few smoke rings ceilingward. "I've had the thing in mind ever since our invitations arrived. But, my dear fellow, you haven't yet given me your opinion."

"I think you are bereft of your senses. The chances that you take will land us both in a state penitentiary one of these days, if not in some European rat-infested dungeon."

But DeLancey only smiled more enigmatically, and commenced smoothing back the black hair that was turning slightly grey at his temples.

I confess that I invariably slumped into a feeling of profound dismay whenever DeLancey proposed to perform one of his apparently impossible exploits. Yet, time and again, he had achieved the seemingly unachievable—and I had been able to go my way rejoicing, knowing that liberty was to be ours for a while longer. But always, down in my heart, the dread feeling existed that sooner or later was to come the one mistake, the one misstep in DeLancey's almost perfect plans, that would carry us both inside the dull grey walls for many years.

Across Europe we had gone, DeLancey leaving in his wake a series of mystifying thefts,—thefts that to this day are riddles to the Continental police. Petrograd, Berlin, Rome, Madrid, Paris, London, even New York, had contributed their toll to the man's super-cunning brain and his magnetic personality. So for the last few months, while we were living in our Chicago bachelor apartment, I felt that we were assuredly to refrain from any more of these feats—at least for an appreciable time to come. It seemed to me that in justice to ourselves, to the pleasure that we took in each other's company, to the joy of existence itself, we should continue to live quietly on the proceeds of DeLancey's last feat—the theft of Castor and Pollux, the famous red and green

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twin diamonds, from the vault of Simon et Cie in the Rue Royale, Paris. Success had crowned that performance, I had good reason to know, for it was into my hands that DeLancey had sent the stones in the custody of Von Berghem. And Von Berghem, travelling as an invalid in company with his small son from Paris to Calais, from Calais to Dover, from Dover to Liverpool, from Liverpool to New York, suspected finally of having had something to do with that inexplicable crime, arrested at the docks in New York and searched for three long hours, had come through unscathed, not an inspector nor a police officer discovering that he was blind and that the diamonds were concealed behind his spectacles—concealed back of his hollow glass eyes themselves.

True, that particular success had been due in a great measure to the skill and cunning of Von Berghem himself, yet it was DeLancey's genius that had first seen the possibilities that lay in the blind beggar whom he had found wandering in the Montmarte cemetery.

I pulled myself together with a start and turned to DeLancey, watching the inscrutable smile that still lingered on his face.

"Are you able to tell me, DeLancey, just how you expect to remove a $100,000 necklace at old Bascom's dinner table under the glare of that big electric chandelier? What do you intend to do if he orders a search? Who the Countess of Cordova is, and how you know she's going to be there? How you know this necklace is to be around her neck? What part I am to play in the affair? How—"

"Enough, T. B.," he chuckled. "Stop your restless pacing back and forth. If you'll sit down I'll answer your questions one at a time."

I dropped back on the edge of my chair and waited to hear what he had to say.

"Now," he began slowly, "it is only fair to tell you, my dear fellow, that our exchequer is low—extremely so. The amount paid over to us by old Moses Stein for Castor and Pollux a year and a half ago—was hopelessly out of proportion to the value of those two stones." He shrugged his shoulders and frowned for the first time. "But that, T. B., is the unfortunate part of this exciting game of ours. The legitimate profits are cut to a half—to a third—even to a fourth

"And so," he went on, "the time has come for one last coup—one big coup; and then, lad, South Australia for you and me. What do you say?"

"Anything," I replied fervently, "is preferable to this continual living in fear of a slip-up of your plans. I like you, DeLancey, and I can't endure the thought of—" I stopped, for a picture of DeLancey being dragged away to suffer the ignoble fate of a prison sentence began to swim before my eyes.

"No doubt you do," he returned, after a pause. "But, nevertheless, the fact remains that our scale of living, the exorbitant rent of this apartment, our club dues, theatres, bachelor dinners, taxicabs, the gifts to that little dark-eyed love of yours, have all helped to consume our capital far too swiftly. But I don't regret it, T. B., for it has been capital well invested, since it has secured us two

invitations already to Garrard Bascom's home in Rogers Park."

"I'm inclined to credit that to your strange, winning personality," I returned.

"Personality, bah!" he snorted. "We've put up a bluff—we've jingled the money—we've belonged to the best clubs in the city; and those are the stunts that have made us welcome in such circles. But tomorrow night," he added savagely, "we'll try to reap the profits."

He paused a moment, and the smile that had so suddenly left his face slowly reappeared. For DeLancey was always genial, always in good humor, seldom ruffled.

"So as I said before," he went on, "it is up to us to make what you native born Americans—you real Yankees—call a killing. But it must be a decent killing, lad, such as the Cordova necklace, for after that episode the name of DeLancey will always be looked upon with a very slight—perhaps an appreciable—degree of suspicion and distrust. But I'll explain.

"Among several questions you asked me how I know that this Countess of Cordova is to be present at old Bascom's dinner tomorrow evening. That, T. B., is simplicity itself. The countess, before she married old Count Cordova of Madrid, was Amelie Bascom of Chicago. And her arrival in this city was chronicled in the Tribune four days ago. Quite elemental reasoning, is it not?

"Have I never told you, my dear fellow, that I met the countess when you and I were in Madrid a year and a half ago? That the good lady, married to that old crustacean, was not at all averse to a violent flirtation? That—if I may be pardoned for any seeming egotism in the statement—I made quite an impression on her?"

I nodded, for now I dimly remembered having heard him mention something about the matter at some obscure time in the past.

"Now," he continued, "when she glances over her estimable papa's list of guests invited to that dinner party, you may rest assured that she is going to arrange to have—er—DeLancey for a partner. Have I made this quite plan?"

"You have. You seem to have a genius for paving your way—months and years ahead."

"Specialization in crime, T. B., merely specialization such as characterizes success in any line of endeavor. But enough of that. I'll now step to another one of your questions: How do I expect to remove a $100,000 necklace at a dinner table under the glare of a huge electric chandelier?"

"Yes. How—"

"By the use of a tiny pair of well sharpened manicure scissors, which, replaced in their black leather case, will be tossed clear across the room and remain unnoticed till the servants are cleaning up the dining room several hours afterward."

"But you haven't answer—"

He raised his hand. "Of course I haven't answered your question. It happens that I'm not going to perform that simple operation in the glare of any hanging electric lights. I have sent in an order for thirty seconds of darkness."

"Thirty seconds of darkness!"

"Exactly. You remember Tzhorka?"

I surely did. Tzhorka was the little dwarfed Russian electrician whom DeLancey had met in the great world of crookdom. On more than one occasion the latter had vaguely hinted to me that Tzhorka had worked with him once before. And this instance, I felt certain, was the night that old Count Ivan Yarosloff's safe in his palace on the Nevski-Prospect at St. Petersburg, was burned open by a pair of carbon electrodes and several thousand amperes of current stolen from the lighting feeders that led to the Russian Admiralty Building at the farther end of the Nevski-Prospect. So since I, no doubt, had helped to spend part of old Yarosloff's 83,000 missing rubles, I became interested at once.

"Yes," he said, "Tzhorka has been in Chicago for some time on plans of his own. And he has agreed to supply me with thirty seconds of darkness at any time I shall indicate."

My face must have shown my bewilderment, for DeLancey hastened to explain his statement.

"Did you notice, the last time we were at the Bascom mansion, how the house was lighted?"

I shook my head.

"Which goes to show, T. B., that your faculties need considerable sharpening before you can stand alone on your legs in this game. If you had taken cognizance of this fact, however, you would have discovered that the current which lights up the mansion and outlying buildings at the center of that great estate is brought over the ground from the Commonwealth Edison Company's feeders which skirt the eastern edge of the property. And in saying that it is brought over the ground, I am referring, of course, to the line of poles which carry two thick cables tapped on the Commonwealth Edison's feeders."

This time I nodded, for I was dimly beginning to comprehend that DeLancey, through the help of Tzhorka, contemplated tampering with this pair of suspended cables, thus interfering with the light supply of the Bascom residence.

"Late last night," DeLancey went on, "Tzhorka, dressed in a complete lineman's outfit, went up the pole that stands on the outer edge of the Bascom estate and spliced on to one of these cables a so-called single pole, single throw switch with carbon contacts. Then, after lashing the inner span to the crossarm by means of a small block-and-tackle and what he terms a come-along, Tzhorka cut the cable completely through with a hack-saw. The whole arrangement, quite inconspicuous in itself, is in addition hidden by the foliage of a nearby tree."

"Then the current that feeds the Bascom estate," I exclaimed triumphantly, "is now passing through this switch. But how—"

"Yes. And if you had used those latent—nay, dormant—faculties of observation that are in you, you would have noticed also that the great French latticed windows of the Bascom dining room are in direct line with that outermost pole. In other words, my dear fellow, if Tzhorka should be astride that cross-arm in the darkness tomorrow night, watching our dinner table intently through a pair of high-

power field glasses, and he should see —er—a certain individual, myself for instance, raise his hand to his head and pat down his hair—say—twice in succession, he might easily slip on a pair of blue goggles and pull the handle of that switch. The house, stables, garage, kitchens, and everything, would be without electric light instantly, until such time that—"

"For thirty seconds—"

"After which," DeLancey concluded coolly, "Tzhorka, consulting the second hand of his watch, would throw back the switch. Then the lights would go on and—"

"You idiot, you rash, foolhardy numbskull," I raged, rising up from my chair in my agitation, "a search would be immediately ordered by Bascom when anywhere from one to twenty-nine of those guests, not counting the countess herself, discovers that this necklace that adorns her neck is missing. You can't—"

"Which brings us face to face with another one of your questions, T. B. What can I do if one or two of those guests prove to be the usual Pinkertons and lock the doors in order to make a thorough search? A neat problem, isn't it?"

"Far, far too neat," I replied bitterly. "DeLancey, get this project out of your mind. You can't do it, I tell you. If you kept the necklace on your person—they would get it sure. And even if you were able to hide it some place during the thirty seconds that Tzhorka, five hundred yards away, holds open the switch, everyone would be watched so closely that you could not dare to regain it." I stopped, disheartened. "And what part am I to play in this affair, as I asked you once?"

"Nothing, this time, lad. All that you need do in the darkness is to draw back your chair and rise, as no doubt some of the men and most of the ladies will. You might rattle a dish or two, if one is handy. Just add to the general confusion, for beyond that I have no definite part for you to play."

I leaned forward and placed my hand on DeLancey's shoulder. "DeLancey, give up this mad idea. I tell you the thing is impossible. Your arrangements are characteristic of the thoroughness that always surrounds your work, and to a certain degree admirable. But I tell you frankly this particular feat cannot be accomplished. It cannot." I leaned forward still farther. "Listen to me, old man. Give it up. Why must you take these chances? Why—"

"Enough, T. B.," he calmly interrupted me. "I've been planning this thing for several days. When I first studied that Cordova necklace in Madrid, just after the old count parted with it for a wedding gift, I felt a strange desire—almost a hope—that I might place my fingers on it within another ten years. I tell you I counted every stone; I feasted my eyes on their pureness, their scintillations, their unusual brilliancy. I studied even the clasp, so obsessed did I become with the thing and the different possibilities for removing it. Not content with that I looked up the records and valuation of the necklace in the Spanish Royal Archives of the Library Madrid. And then and there I determined that the

Cordova line—money lenders, interest sharks, blood suckers as they had been for the past five generations—should pay toll at least to the thousandth part of what they themselves have stolen."

I know that DeLancey's decision was final, for there, in his last statement, was his whole philosophy of theft summed up. Never yet had I known him to lay a finger on the property of anyone except those scattered individuals who had amassed their wealth by extortion and trickery. So I saw full well that all the arguments in the world would prove to be useless now.

I made no more attempts at dissuading him from his purpose. Instead, I tried with all my ability to induce him to tell me just what method he expected to follow in order to leave Bascom's house with this $100,000 necklace in his possession. Did he intend, perhaps, to toss it from the French window? No, he claimed, for the coolness of the late fall weather was too great to count on the possibility of those windows being open. More than that he refused to say. And yet it seemed that some scheme, some rational, logical procedure, was mapped out in his brain, if he had gone to the trouble of securing Tzhorka's services in tampering with the electric cables that fed the Bascom estate.

After a quarter of an hour of vain questioning, I gave it up, for he proved adamantine this time in his resolve not to allow me to enter his plans. He persisted in arguing that, since I could be of no assistance whatever in this instance, it was best that I remain in total ignorance of what was to take place. And finally he seized his silk hat and ordered me to drop the whole subject and come for a stroll along Michigan Boulevard.

I confess that I did not sleep very well that night, for something seemed to tell me that tomorrow was the last day that we should be together; that the following evening was to end disastrously for DeLancey. But as I slipped into a bathrobe in the morning, I met DeLancey himself, emerging from his cold plunge, pink cheeked, smiling, totally lacking the slightest shadow under his eyes. Truly, it seemed as though there was nothing in the world that could disturb the man's equanimity.

After finishing the breakfast that was brought up to our suite, DeLancey donned his cape, took up his hat and walking stick, and pressed the button that summoned a taxicab.

"Now, my dear fellow," he said, "I may be away all day today as I have been during the past two days. Can you exist without me?"

"I thought that perhaps we should have this last day together—a trip to the country, for instance. But here you go off again—on that mysterious business that's been keeping you for two days now. If something unusual should develop, where could I find you?"

He wrinkled up his brows. "Well—I may as well tell you that my whereabouts are uncertain. But for the present I'm off to old Moses Stein's shop on Halsted Street, ostensibly to make a purchase, but in reality to conclude the details for disposing of this necklace before we leave

for Australia. I may be gone for—"

"Old Stein, the jewel shark? The fence?"

"Yes."

"Then you're still quite confident that you are to have everything your own way in stealing that necklace? That you can deliberately walk out of the house with it? That you will not make a single mistake?"

"Not absolutely confident," he said simply. "But old Stein knows that necklace as he knows pretty nearly everything of value in the world of jewels, and he has agreed to pay over sixty per cent of the intrinsic value of those stones. And I, in turn, have agreed to place it in his hands by midnight tonight. So you see, T. B., there is no re-crossing of the Rubicon." He paused a moment. "I may be gone the greater part of the day. Since we dare not employ a valet, you might, if you will, lay out my evening clothes, studs, and gloves at six o'clock tonight—and order the taxicab for seven-thirty. The dinner is scheduled for nine, and we must allow at least an hour and a half to reach Rogers Park."

And without even allowing me to put forth one last argument, he slipped from our apartment. A second later I heard the clang of the descending elevator in the outer hallway.

That day was surely an unpleasant one for me. It seemed as though the fear of a slip-up haunted me this time far more than it had in all DeLancey's previous affairs in which I had participated. I tried to read, but my attention failed utterly to stay with the printed page. I tried to smoke, but invariably my cigar grew cold in my fingers while I became lost in my own abstractions.

What plans DeLancey had contrived I could not imagine. Why had he been so rash as to take the old jewel fence, Moses Stein, into his confidence on the subject of the Cordova necklace? Yet I knew, too, that on more than one occasion DeLancey had consulted with the old man on various jobs. One thing, at least, was certain. In dealing with old Stein he was dealing with an individual who knew the exact value and description of every piece of jewelry in the world of any historical value. In fact, it was Stein who had outbid Ranseer, the mad gem collector, for possession of Castor and Pollux, a year or more before, and that without ever having seen the stones, so well did he know their size, color, shape, cutting, and purity. So no doubt he knew the Cordova necklace as well, if he had agreed on a finite sum to be paid over for it.

The day dragged by interminably.

I spent the afternoon walking along Michigan Boulevard and returning to the apartment at intervals of an hour, feverishly looking for DeLancey to put in an appearance. Came two o'clock, three o'clock, four o'clock. At five o'clock the afternoon light faded. As darkness came on, I laid out his evening clothes and his studs. Then I ordered the taxicab for seven-thirty. And when this was done, I heard six o'clock tinkle from the tiny onyx clock on our mantel.

What in heaven's name, I wondered vaguely, could be keeping him? Mysterious as his movements had been in the last two days, he had not yet

remained away so late as this. Where had he gone after leaving Moses Stein's? Or was he still lolling in the old man's Halsted Street shop?

Came six-thirty o'clock—and DeLancey!

He bustled into the apartment and quickly locked the door behind him. I was making a poor attempt at dressing for the Bascom dinner. He glanced hurriedly at his watch and slipped into his own bedroom without a word, where I heard him splashing about in his tub a few moments later.

But just as I looked from the boulevard window at seven-thirty and saw the lights of our taxicab as it drew up to the curbing far down in the darkness below, he emerged from his room, dressed in his immaculate evening clothes, debonair as ever, smiling as though the fortunes of the night meant nothing to him, one way or the other.

We descended to the taxicab and started out on the long journey to Rogers Park. DeLancey persisted, however, in chatting about a host of trivial subjects, the very discussion of which required all my self-restraint and composure. But when I touched ever so lightly on the subject of the Cordova necklace, he frowned and quickly changed the subject.

It was a quarter to nine when we rolled up Sheridan Road and turned in between the two great ornamental iron fence posts that marked the entrance to the Bascom grounds. A short drive farther over a gravel road between two tall blackthorn hedges brought us to a grating stop at the steps of the mansion itself. A second later an obsequious footman was opening the door of the cab.

So now the die was cast, for no more that evening—perhaps forever—could I have even a single secret word with DeLancey.

As I mingled with the guests in the drawing room, I tried my best to appear composed and completely at ease. Old Garrard Bascom passed from group to group, and shortly catching sight of me, standing alone and forlorn, introduced me to a pretty debutante who was to be my partner at the table. And I confess that my conversation held forth little promise of an entertaining evening for her, for my attention persisted in straying around the great room, from one individual to another.

Jewels there were a-plenty. They flashed from the ear lobes of most of the women, and from the shirt bosoms of some of the men. Here and there a pearl necklace could be seen, and once I caught sight of a flashing diamond stomacher adorning the person of a huge, powered, beruffled dowager. The Cordova necklace, however, was the one object which I seemed unable to locate.

But suddenly I caught sight of both it and its owner—and DeLancey as well, seated on a divan which was almost concealed from my view by a huge fern. Truly, there could be no doubt that the rather faded woman who sat looking up at DeLancey was the Countess of Cordova, for when she tossed her head coquettishly at his no doubt complimentary sallies, the sinuous coil around her white throat seemed to emit a veritable stream of colored fire. As for him, however, he seemed quite oblivious

to it. All preliminaries, though, must come to an end. Yet, when the butler appeared in the wide doorway and announced dinner, my heart persisted in giving a strange leap. But I gave my arm to my partner and followed the guests to the dining room.

Matters there were just as DeLancey had stated they would be. The French latticed windows were tightly shut. Plainly, then, he must carry the Cordova necklace out of the house himself if it were to be carried away at all. As I dropped into my chair I could see far, far off through the window, the twinkling lights of a passing automobile on Sheridan Road, and I found myself wondering what thoughts were running through Tzhorka's head as he crouched on the wooden cross-arm at the outermost edge of the estate and surveyed this laughing, chatting assemblage through the field glasses that DeLancey had mentioned.

As chance would have it, I found myself seated directly across from DeLancey and the countess. Several times during the first few moments I tried to catch his eye, but his whole attention seemed to be concentrated on arousing the inherent vanity of the woman who sat at his side. And since I could not hear a word of what he was saying, so great was the babble of conversation and the chink of glasses, I determined to conceal my nervousness to the best of my ability and to pay more attention to my partner.

Course after course proceeded with clockwork regularity. That the preliminary cocktails had mounted to the heads of some of the younger members was plain, for their laughter grew stronger and more strident. Old Bascom, from his position at the head of the table, beamed in turn on everyone, and the servants passed mechanically and noiselessly from chair to chair. And as nothing happened, I commenced wondering whether DeLancey had changed his plans at the last moment.

My gaze kept up a rather rapid circuit from the chattering young woman at my side, to the top of DeLancey's smoothly brushed black hair, to the string of sparkling brilliants around the countess's neck, to two of the guests who sat at the very end of the long table. Somehow, I felt instinctively that they were not of the same world as the rest of those people, for the man's jaws were too strong, and his close-cropped mustache seemed to proclaim the plain-clothes man to such an extent that his perfect evening dress was considerably out of keeping with the rest of him. As for the young woman at his side, she had too much of an alert, business-like air about her, and a complexion that showed too well the absence of the trained masseur—and the French maid.

Yet nothing happened.

The last course was brought to the table, and a few moments later its empty dishes were removed. Then the tinkling glasses of iced creme dementhe were carried in and distributed. And just as I had concluded with a sigh of relief that DeLancey had given up his scheme, he performed precisely the gesture that I had been seeing in my mind's eye for the past twenty-four hours.

He raised his right hand carelessly to the top of his head and patted his hair twice.

Almost automatically I turned my own head and gazed in the direction of the latticed window—only far out and beyond, into the darkness. It seemed that several long seconds elapsed. But when I detected a bright point of light breaking into being a quarter mile distant, I knew that Tzhorka was playing his part. Almost on the heels of this momentary flash, the lights on the great chandelier above the table, as well as the tiny frosted bulbs along the fresco work on the walls, dimmed—and went completely dark.

In the profound blackness that ensued, only an intense stillness, the stillness of utter surprise, followed. Then came a chorus of exclamations, which, with a ripple or two of laughter, served to break the silence. On top of this, a number of chairs were drawn hastily back from the table, and I heard a rumble of anger coming from the direction of old Bascom's place.

At this juncture, a succession of peculiar, almost indistinguishable, sounds struck my ear, for I, of all that assemblage, was expecting them. I heard a slight snip, then a sharp sound as though some light object had struck the opposite wall of the room. Following this came the faintest suggestion of a metallic tinkle. But on top of that a woman's alarming scream sounded forth: "My necklace—"

Almost instantly, it seemed, a match was struck on the under side of a chair, and as it flared up I saw with surprise that it was in DeLancey's hand, and that he was standing erect looking dumfoundedly down at the countess.

"Get matches—or lights—or something, some of you men," he commanded sharply. "The countess has fainted—and her necklace is gone from her throat. Bascom, lock the doors. Don't let a man—"

But his words were interrupted by the instantaneous bursting into radiance of the great chandelier above the table.

The thirty seconds were over.

And it was just as DeLancey had cleverly announced, for, as far as I could see, he had deliberately drawn suspicion to himself in order to bolster up his own unpleasant position. The countess sat slumped up in her chair, in a dead faint. DeLancey stood above her, still holding the blackened match stub. And every guest, without exception, was staring open-mouthed at her white throat, now utterly devoid of a single diamond.

This last tableau lasted for only an instant. Then the man with the close-cropped mustache, whom I had suspected all along of being an employe of the Pinkerton system, crossed the floor rapidly and planted his back to the door, at the same time throwing back his coat and displaying a shining steel badge. Almost as quickly, a young society man next to him crossed to the French latticed window and took up a position there.

Now we were in for it. Fool, fool, fool of a DeLancey, I reflected bitterly.

Old Bascom, who had been stand-

ing bewildered at the head of the table, looking stupidly from his daughter's crumpled-up form to the man posted at the door, ejaculated:

"God bless my soul, O'Rourke, what's the matter? What—"

"There's been crooked work pulled off here, Mr. Bascom," retorted that individual quickly. "Can't you see that your daughter's necklace is gone?" He turned to the group around the table. "Two of you ladies help to bring the countess out of her faint. Some of you men look under her chair. If that necklace isn't found, you'll have to step in the next room one by one and be searched." He looked down the table to the young woman who had been his partner. "Miss Kelly, I'll detail you to search the ladies if the necklace isn't on the floor."

A chorus of indignant protests arose from the ladies. The men gasped and looked from one to the other with manifest suspicion written on their faces. A number of the guests stared at DeLancey, who still stood where he was, passing his hand over his brow.

"I feel," he stammered feebly, "that this puts me in a rather peculiar light. If—if there's to be any search made, I suggest that it be made on me first. I—"

But he was interrupted by one of the male guests who pointed down the table and exclaimed: "The countess's glass of cr—"

That gentleman, however, had no opportunity to finish his statement, for the female detective suddenly broke in:

"Look, ladies and gentlemen." She, too, pointed at the countess's untouched glass of creme de menthe. "The lady's glass of cordial is the only one on the table that's been spilled all over the cloth. It might be that—"

"God bless my soul," said old Bascom again, still trying to collect his wits, "what are you all driving at?"

I lost no time in staring at the point which Miss Kelly was indicating, and I saw what she was trying to call everyone's attention to. Just as she had announced, the green cordial in the countess's glass had slopped down the sides of the fragile vessel and had made a great sticky stain around the base. And I daresay that everyone else saw it at the same time. Miss Kelly, however, hurriedly crossed around the end of the long table and hooked a business-like finger to the bottom of the glass. A fraction of a second later I found myself picturing DeLancey's inward rage when he saw that he had been outwitted by a woman.

For as she raised her hand, something was hanging from the crook of her finger; something that might once have held all the colors of the rainbow, but which now, covered as it was with sticky green syrup, hanging pendent with the clasp opened, covered from one end to the other with creme de menthe, dripping green drops that seemed like emeralds being born from more emeralds, showed plainly where the Cordova necklace had gone. With no regard for the white table cloth, she held it up so that everyone could see.

"The necklace," she stated slowly and triumphantly, "has not been stolen." She looked toward Bascom.

"An apology is due your guests, Mr. Bascom."

"God bless my—" he started to say faintly for the third time. But suddenly he seemed to collect his senses. He snatched up a napkin and, unfolding it, leaned over and held it under Miss Kelly's outstretched hand. Without a word she dropped the necklace into it, and he hurriedly folded it up and placed it safely in his breast pocket. Then he turned to the stupified butler.

"Harkins, get the countess's maid and help her to her room." He then glanced angrily at O'Rourke. "O'Rourke, you've made a nasty mistake." He looked at the rest of the assemblage. "I trust, ladies and gentlemen, that you will pardon this affront to your honesty here tonight. This is surely a deplorable happening. Something seemed to have interrupted the city current supply, and in the excitement my daughter must have leaned over, with the result that the clasp of her necklace loosened and it dropped into her glass of cordial. I humbly ask the pardon of one and all of you for the whole occurrence."

With the sudden entrance of the countess's maid, the guests quickly adjourned to the drawing room, the gentlemen, apparently by mutual understanding, giving up the usual coffee and cigars. On the way out of the dining room I caught sight of DeLancey and his face appeared as black as a thundercloud. Perhaps the abrupt disclosure that Pinkerton employes were at the table, or else their crude methods in handling the situation aroused some ire among the ladies, for cabs were called for shortly after and one by one the guests melted away.

With DeLancey I climbed into our vehicle, but nothing was said by either of us until we were rolling out of the Bascom grounds and down Sheridan Road. Then he remarked glumly:

"Well?"

"Well, I consider that you were mighty lucky to escape with your liberty. Your deal proved a fiasco—just as I felt it would all the time. In fact, you might just as well have taken a megaphone and called the attention of the whole company to the countess's creme de menthe glass, for the stuff was slopped all over the cloth. But one thing I'd like to ask, DeLancey. Did you honestly intend to drop the necklace into the cordial glass—or was that an accident?"

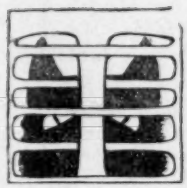
He spoke fully for the first time since leaving the Bascom estate.

"My dear T. B.," he said slowly, "how very, very obtuse you are. Is it possible that you don't yet know that the necklace which was fished from the countess's creme de menthe glass, and held up dripping and covered with the green syrup for everyone to see, was a paste duplicate that was put together by old Stein and myself in the last three days? Is it—"

But there was no need of his explaining further, for as we passed an arc-lamp and its rays flashed into the carriage, I saw something gleaming and sparkling in the palm of his hand—something that seemed to hold in leash the colors of a thousand rainbows.

Suspended Animation

BY WILLIAM DUDLEY PELLEY



HE traffic officer decided that when it came to driving an automobile I should go back to the Appian Way and take lessons on a mule in a chariot. Quite coldly he refused my exclamatory assurances of latent dexterity. He insisted I maintain it at the headquarters of Public Safety. This decided me that the party who wrote "Hail to the Chief Who in Triumph Advances," had in mind a corn-fed cop, crossing the street to take his license number.

But my friend, the officer, had rushed in where ward aldermen feared to tread. Instead of a sermon I got a cigar; instead of a cell he was sold himself. For, preposterous as it appears, his superior owed me a twenty.

"Have you any more specimens of law and order, corned-beef and cabbage," I requested, "whose brains put into a mustard seed would rattle round like a peanut in a wash-boiler?"

"Once in a while we get them," Chief Quilty admitted as I took a chance on his cigar. "But you're not so bad as Learny. There's where I agree that a bone-headed cop gave a gentleman chance for a grievance. You remember, a year ago his jewelry store was robbed on the night of all nights when he had the Hobart diamond in his safe?"

I remembered.

"Don't think that a trifle like an inconsideration of traffic rules gives you warrant to fricassee the police department. You should have seen the verbal lashing Learny gave me the following morning."

"You mean heard."

"I mean seen. Learny is a dumb man—writes his conversation on a pad. I put the compilation in my drawer and the desk caught fire. The boys said it was rats in my smoking matches. I said it was Learny's conversation. Well sir, that famous robbery happened because I detailed a green Irishman to that beat, whose thought-box, under a microscope, would resemble the eye of a needle viewed from the wrong end of a telescope."

While I waited for the cigar to explode, this is the yarn that Chief Quilty told me.

At five o'clock on a drizzly afternoon, Casey, the Nitro-glycerine Artist, got word of the Hobart. Half an hour later he shuffled by Learny's, sandwiched between Sweeney's Undertaking Parlors and the Gem Theater.

Learny had the Hobart because Learny's was distinctive. First, for years he had catered to Our Best Families; second, his shop was of such titanic smallness that unkind competitors marveled how he added half-a-dozen stick-pins to his stock without moving out his safe. Beware your Jewelry with the portals of a

trust company. Many a hole in the wall houses a Kohinoor and a dozen dollar watches. Learny's was that kind of place.

Big as a Vermont farmer, stolid as the park statue of the Civil War soldier and dirty as a modern Mexican, Casey reconnoitered with all the indifference of a man shopping with his wife at a corset department. In the course of getting his bearings, he found that an alley lay behind the building, which contained the desertion of a home where the female contingent believes in votes for women, to say nothing of three barrels, a crate of straw and a yellow dog. I refer to the alley, not to the belief of the female contingent.

To Casey's trained eye the outlook was excellent. The safety of the Hobart depended on the ignorance of anyone regarding its presence. How Casey came by his information is another story. At the moment it was peaches and cream to force an entrance to Learny's—for one who could drill his way through the side of a battleship.

Casey, satisfied, came from the alley and wended his way across the city. He entered the back room of a bar you would never suspect of being such —until a perplexed individual sailed through the swinging doors followed by a bungstarter to keep him on his way.

While Casey waited in the rear room for Longfellow to waft down the feathered darkness from the wings of a murky evening, the Frisco Kid entered exactly on the moment to become chief mourner at the obsequies when Casey buried his face in a beer.

The Frisco Kid walked on the balls of his feet, his collar was up and his shoulders were rounded. His voluminous cap looked like a jockey's in front and an Indiana woman's market basket behind. The visor and the collar were evidences that we wanted the Frisco Kid badly and the Frisco Kid knew it.

The Frisco Kid spotted the protuberance that meant cold steel on Casey's hip.

"Some day, bo," he remarked in a hoarse whisper, "you'll get de pen carryin' too much wet freight on de job."

"Kid," rejoined Casey, "it's a wet night and the job on the hoof ain't breakin' into no Turkish bath."

"A jimmy and Extra Dry ain't Siamese twins, Casey," the other warned. "When you're puttin' de fricassee on trap rock in de interests of de good roads' movement, you'll curse Milwaukee like dat jane, Francis E. Willard. Safety First, bo. *Safety First.*"

The Kid scowled further when, an hour later, he saw Casey tuck a pint on the hip.

"I'm all right," Casey answered; "think if I whittled off dem hinges and found the tray filled with four postage stamps and a bent cent."

When Casey went out, the Kid followed.

A cold, dank, clammy drizzle filtered in front of an eye of light later that night in the rear of Learny's. The cellar window went out and Casey in. Slipping from the downpour he landed on a pile of ashes.

The cellar was musty and smelled of soot, straw and burglar, this last odor being substantiated by Madam

Carrie Nation and the W. C. T. U. Picking his stealthy way over crates, bales and boxes, Casey blinked his demon's eye and found the stairs. "A cinch," said he. "Easy as smellin' garlic on a wop."

He mounted the stairs. Thereat came the first effect of the liquor for he ascertained with a dull phrenological bump, that the aperture in Learny's was covered with a trap door dictated by a building inspector who had to earn his money.

"Locked!" he exclaimed thickly, and laboriously he sat on the second stair and laid out his tools.

Well, at one o'clock he had jimmied the door, thrown it up and climbed through. Very carefully he poised the heavy section of flooring against the wall. Then he shifted his flash.

He shifted his flash so he could have a pull on the pint on his hip. Right here Casey made his second mistake, his first being the day when Dandelion Casey had accepted the belief that booze and burglaring were comrades in this vale of tears. The flashlight slipped from shaky fingers, rolled along to the edge of the flooring and fell with such a crash to the cement beneath that the infinitesimal bits of glass couldn't be found with a Yerkes telescope or a janitor in bare feet.

Casey cursed and felt in his pockets for a match. As he did so, the trap door answered the draft between the transom and the mutilated cellar window and came down into place with the dexerity of a miser's strong-box when its owner hears a prowler.

From Casey's standpoint, here was some predicament.

On the floor above knelt one strong and perfectly healthy burglar, his system fairly bursting with burgle. Two feet below, on the cellar stairs, was his kit of tools and farther down, in seventy thousand pieces, was his only source of illumination. Between them was a trap door without a handle—and Casey in the next three minutes made the discovery that he had no matches.

The Nitro-glycerine Artist rolled onto the seat of his trousers and addressed the bowels of darkness.

"I have feelings in me boozum," says he, "like a priest calling on a woman with a profane parrot. Side of me the feller who gets up the Flivver car jokes is bright enough to run for guv'nor of New York on the Prohibition ticket—and get elected. I belongs in an insane asylum for idoits!

"Sufferin' cats!" he went on, after vainly fumbling in the darkness. "Do they send for a carpenter every time they want to coal up the furnace? Or do they climb through the cellar windows from the outside and raise it with their heads?"

Casey was caught, trapped, frustrated. He had suddenly become the bold, bad burglar who couldn't break out. I mention this because he was sitting thus in the dark, meditating, when through the semi-darkness came the lift of a door-latch in front, followed by a jest and an answer. A night-watchman sat in the entrance outside, the tip of his midnight cigar paragraphing the darkness. He had joked with the roundsman testing the doors.

If ever a burglar was between William Travers Jerome and the deep blue sea, it was Casey. Cut off in the

rear and guarded in the front, the Artist sought still further consolation at his hip.

"The stunt to do," soliloquized Casey, "is to explore this dog-house. If a guy can't go forwards or backwards he can always go up in the air. Maybe there's a fire escape."

As he arose stealthily, he saw a show-case before him. He felt his way along the edge and paused when it ended abruptly.

"What kind of cases," he demanded, "is empty of glass on the top? Is this where they keep the ten-cent jewelry or did John D. come in for a stick-pin and lay down his wad on the glass?"

Casey's shaking hand felt around the edge. Then in natural sequence he ran it down among the baubles.

Shades of Edgar Allen Poe! Casey's trembling fingers encountered a motionless human face!

In South Dakota there is a waterfall that drops three hundred thousand gallons of water per second, one hundred and ninety feet. Comparisons may be odious, but in Peter Sweeney's Undertaking Parlors was a lugubrious safe-blower whose forehead beat that record by a pint. Moreover, the water was icy cold.

"D. T's of Saint Patrick!" chattered Casey, "has I jimmied into a morgue for corpses or has the proprietor installed a wax-works?"

Richard III. offered his kingdom for a positive high-power automoble. Casey I. would have bartered his immortal soul for a single measly match. Yet with the cold chills of the Thing he had felt still tingling on his arm, he knew he could no more light it than would a mere husband a Christmas cigar in the Elk's.

"Wives of the saints!" he stuttered hoarsely. "I'm in the wrong cellar and come up in the undertaker's." Again he felt for the flask. "I got to get out of this if I strain a lung," he continued. "I wonder is there's furniture enough lying round loose to hoist me to them side windows?"

He was feeling around among the empty coffins when he suddenly paused like Cæsar with his nightshirt full of holes.

Someone was again jesting with the watchman. This time it was not the roundsman, for a key was turning in the lock.

Frantically ascertaining that the nearest coffin was empty, Casey had barely time to stumble up and stretch himself at full length in a happy inspiration of concealment. The next instant the apartment was flooded with a blare of light.

Peter Sweeney employed a clerk named Bean—Reginald B. Bean. His middle initial stood for Blannerhasset, not Baked. He had sore feet, pimples on his face, and wore his hair in the cut of 1888. By this, despite his name, you may know he was a dead one—which may have had something to do with his employment in an undertaking establishment.

Reggie had been sentimentally employed, it being Wednesday evening, and his homeward way led past the location of his daily employment. It happened that as Reggie's tongue had been more or less glued to the roof of his mouth during the evening, by the time he arrived opposite the Parlors, he was assailed by a most tre-

mendous thirst. As he had a key to the establishment, he had crossed the street for a drink.

He nodded to the watchman and informed him he was making his nocturnal visit for a drink of *Aqua Pura*. The watchman took this for some new brand of Crow and grinned socially in at the door.

Thus it happened that Reginald passed within eighteen inches of Dandelion and went his way to the rear sink for water, while the watchman, unallowed for by the burglar, stood staring expectantly down the long run of the undertaker's apartments.

What the watchman saw was this: The face of a man—white as the make-up of a movie actor—bob upward from the longest, blackest casket in the lot and stare the watchman in the eye.

The watchman blinked six times, swallowed twice, grabbed the door frantically, and for a moment had a long neck.

Casey saw three things: The open door, the helplessness of the astounded watchman, and the fact that, having given his presence away, he must now break and run.

With one leap he was out of the box and with legs unsteady from liquor, descended on the doorway and the watchman.

The watchman stood transfixed, held it for three seconds, then fell back on the walk with a howl resembling an Irish comedian trying to yodle.

Casey, having the doorway to himself, utilized it for purposes for which such apertures are made.

Then the watchman found his voice —likewise sundry fragments of the English language.

"Reggie, Reggie!" he bellowed. "Your corpse is out and he's drunk as a lord!" With which astounding information, the watchman took after the figure fleeing unsteadily through the drizzle.

By the time Reggie reached the door, burglar and watchman were half a block away and still going. After them sped the day clerk, somehow deeming it a species of larceny that any of the stock should take unto themselves legs and fly away.

And here comes in this green cop—Barney Flanerty. Barney was young, new on the force and filled with a hallucination to rise in the world. He had landed at Ellis Island a couple of weeks previous and a friendly alderman had secured him a job on the police force. Barney was put on the beat the night that Learny's had the Hobart because we thought a green man would watch that place with a sense of greater responsibility than an old one.

Flanerty, therefore, on beholding three figures flying through the night from the vicinity of Learny's Jewelry, stopped the spinning of his night-stick and started in pursuit.

"What's up?" says he, catching the flying jumper-tails of the watchman.

"One of Sweeney's corpses is loose," bellows the watchman, "and he's gettin' away!"

"And what are yez chasin' him for?" Flanerty wants to know as he joined exertions abreast with Reggie and the other.

"His relatives may sue us for damages if we lose him," sobbed Reggie.

Somehow he felt that if he had not left the door open, the subject would have remained deceased.

"Who is he?" persisted Flanerty.

"Must be Old Tolliver. Died of some funny heart trouble. Probably it's started pumping again. They call it suspended animation."

"Suspended what?"

"Suspended animation."

"Oh," said Barney, divided between confessing his medical ignorance or running in Reggie instead as a lunatic.

Casey dodged the iron girders of an elevator stairway, ducked behind a dump-cart of nocturnal street cleaners and darted into an alley. Half a dozen pedestrians had joined the chase.

With a liquor-fogged heart shrieking for a breathing spell, the burglar at length made Hogan's Saloon—otherwise known as Paddy's Suds Parlor. Tony, the bar-boy, was scrubbing the floor. The floor was smooth with the subs, but not the kind Paddy wiped off the bar. In two strides Casey's feet had become unmanageable. In two more they had left the floor and, with an enormous grunt, he not only landed on the back of his head, but slid in this peculiar position for several feet.

"They're chasin' me, Tony," says he, "because I'm a corpse that objects to the burial. And I've a splinter in me embalmed back that feels like a red-hot poker working inward with the tenacity of cactus. Swear you ain't seen me while I duck downstairs."

But Casey lingered too long elucidating. Officer Flanerty bore through the door, poised on a greased shute, nearly allowed both feet to reach the gas-jet and bounded twice.

"Yez are oonder arrist!" he bellows, hanging to Casey's disappearing ankle.

"Under what rule of the department do youse arrest a guy for not wanting burial with his boots on?" demanded Casey.

Flanerty got unsteadily to his feet, gyrated again and sat down. Still seated, he scratched the back of his head. The balance of the hounds arrived at this moment, belated but zestful to be in at the kill,—all but poor Reggie. Reggie had smashed head-on into the street-cleaner's dump-cart and throwing him half-way in, the cart had started wildly for an emergency station.

"Stop yez jammin'," roared Flanerty. He turned to Casey. It had suddenly penetrated his diamond skull that the Book of Rules read: Patrolmen when in doubt should make the arrest on suspicion and investigate later.

"Explain it to th' sergeant," he commanded, getting to his feet with Casey in one hand and his battered helmet in the other.

And to the station house he dragged him, though it took fifteen minutes to get him there. Flanerty had not yet learned the curves of "th' little talk-box on th' shtick" as he designated a patrolman's telephone,—and totally ignored the function of the Black Maria.

To the desk man he produced him, battered but triumphant. Bill, the blotter clerk, did not look up as he reached for his pen.

It was Flanerty's first arrest. He drew himself up proudly.

"What's the charge, Officer?" asks Bill.

"Dishturbin' th' peace with animated suspenders," announced the victorious Flanerty in a loud voice.

"What?" exclaims Bill the desk man. He looked up and recognized the officer. Then Bill grew apoplectic.

"So it's *you!*" he roared. He arose so quickly his chair thumped over behind him.

"'Tis me," confirmed Flanerty beaming.

"You bet it's you, and if it ain't your last night on the force I'll turn over my job to the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Irishmen. You've been off your beat half an hour. And we've just got word that the Frisco Kid has improved the opportunity to get away with every darmed sparkler in Learny's safe."

There was a dull, heavy thud before the deskman's blotter. It came from Casey, the burglar. The information was the blow that stunned. Prostrate he lay before the bewildered policeman's feet.

"Now,' demanded the irate Bill, "what's the matter with him?"

Flanerty was divided between the staggering information about Learny's burglary and the prostrate man.

"Somethin' tells me," he blurted forth, "his animated suspenders must have bursted, sorr."

The Fur Mitten Angel

BY MARGARET E. WINSLOW STEWART

WHEN Willard Cartwright's beautiful young wife had been instantly killed in an automobile accident, the little world at Foxhill, the larger world of the husband's host of friends, and the outer world of acquaintances and newspaper readers, had been shocked into silence. Many an old classmate, meeting Cartwright on the street, catapulted a desperate "Carty, old man," against the wall of speechlessness which reared itself beyond the crunching grip of a friendly handclasp. Even little Mrs. Headley, Foxhill's most noted gossip, merely burst into tears when someone spoke of Mrs. Cartwright at the first club meeting after the accident.

Cartwright, himself, accepted the silence gratefully; sold the Queen Anne cottage and the town car, bought a two-story bungalow on the outskirts of town and settled down to a life only slightly different from the old one, to outward appearances. For the innate secretiveness of the masculine nature, coupled in Cartwright's case with that superior secretiveness of a loyal husband and father, had successfully hidden from the most observing and watchful eyes the sorrow of his married life—and the fear. Foxhill, to be sure, awoke to the realization that Mrs Cartwright had appeared very little in the company of her husband during the three years they had lived in the cottage. But it attributed the fact to the adorable little Patricia, whose three summers, swiftly passing, had blown her golden hair into ringlets and whipped her dimpled cheeks with nature's roses.

Physically a tall, strong man, fine-featured from the purposeful cleft in his chin to the square, white forehead, Cartwright was a protector by instinct, and as long as the frail Sylvia had needed him, he had devoted his life to guarding her from the cruelty of an unloving world and from the direst enemy of all, herself. When the baby Patricia came, the father had assumed the greater part of her care, spending hours, and even days, away from his office to be with her, teaching her all the little accomplishments of babyhood, entwining her affections and interest so closely about his companionship that the child was only truly happy when with him.

On the first evening in the new home, Cartwright dined with Patricia sitting on his knee, and afterward rocked her in the September twilight of the living-room for a long time, the father absorbed in his thoughts and Patricia in the happiness of being in his arms. They had been separated since the tragedy, and the novelty of the new house and yard had claimed the baby's attention until this moment. Then, "Where is my Mama?" she asked suddenly.

"Patty darling, pretty Mama has gone away."

"Patty find her," replied his little daughter, attempting to slide from his lap.

Cartwright held her closer and pressed his lips to her curls.

"No, dear, you couldn't find her. Pretty Mama has gone far, far away, and Daddy and Patty will live here in this nice, new house."

"But Patty find pretty Mama," persisted the child.

"No, darling, Patty must stay home and mind Gretchen and play with the new kitty. Daddy will come home every afternoon to play with Patty if she is a good girl. Let's go find the kitty."

With remarkable perseverance, Patricia referred many times in the following weeks to her intention of going in search of her mother. Someone inadvertently pointed upward in explaining that pretty Mama had gone away, and for several hours Patricia was lost, to be found at last by her frantic father in the uttermost corner of the black store-room at the top of the house.

So, when one cold day in November, Cartwright hurried up the walk, saw no little rosebud face at the window, and found a note on the hall table which read, "The baby is lost. Everybody is out looking for her," he knew at once on what mission the child had bent her tiny steps. Confused throbs of terror and bitterness at the tragic irony of the situation bowed his head in his hands for a moment, but the next found him calmly and intelligently doing all in his power to find his little daughter. Realizing that he could do more good by directing the movements of the searching parties than by rushing blindly into the search himself, the father forced himself to remain at the house. From telephone to window he paced, hunting in every cranny of the building, haunted the baby's room, where the early shadows and his imagination sent him leaping more than once toward a tumbled little dress on the bed or a tiny shoe peeping out from behind the door.

Toward dinner time the servants crept in, frightened and defeated. Gretchen, whose special care the baby was, fell on her knees at sight of the father's drawn face and prayed in frantic German. Cartwright lifted her to her feet and asked kindly:

"When did you miss the baby, Gretchen?"

"Oh, it was about two o'clock," sobbed the girl. "We all thought she was taking her nap, but when I went up stairs to dress her, she was gone! You must have started home because we could not reach you by telephone. We have hunted ever since and Thomas even went into the city because the station agent said he thought he remembered seeing a little girl get on the afternoon train."

Further questioning elicited no information of importance, so the household waited, catching its breath at every unusual sound, longing to push the hands of the clock forward, forward beyond these creeping hours of uncertainty.

The cold grew more intense, the blackness more leaden. Cartwright ordered all the lights in the house turned on and he himself prepared the baby's room as if she would sleep in it that night, turning down the white sheet in the little crib, laying out the

tiny nightie, the warm pink bathrobe and the soft slippers. Then once more he paced the long living-room while the rising wind and approaching midnight were insidiously working madness in his brain.

At last he crumpled in a chair and endeavored to let the numbness of his tense muscles cloud his consciousness. But just at that moment the front door bell boomed through the house and instantly he was a quivering wire of hope. Then forcing the excitement out of his tone he muttered, "Only another curious neighbor or a report of no luck," and dully glanced toward the doorway to see the curtains parted and his despair belied.

Against the velvet portiere stood a slender woman, holding in her arms the chubby form of little Patricia. An ineffable sweetness radiated from the woman's face, but it was something else, something he could not name, which held Cartwright a prisoner in his chair, his burning eyes fastened strangely upon her beautiful features. Slowly she crossed the room and laid the sleeping child in her father's arms. Patricia stirred, burrowed her golden head contentedly in his shoulder and murmured, "Patty find pretty Mama. Patty bring her home to Daddy."

An electric thrill sent tingling Cartwright's every fibre. That was it! The remarkable resemblance to Sylvia! But the expression in the shadowy eyes and about the parted lips was new. It was as though the mother-love, quickened by separation from her child and a glimpse of heavenly things, had made strong the weak Sylvia.

Still without speaking, the father imprinted a tender kiss upon Patricia's forehead and gave her into the waiting Gretchen's care. Turning slowly toward the hearth, whither the woman had drawn after releasing the child, Cartwright half expected to see no one there or a shining light where she had stood. But the slender figure remained, lighted by the dancing fire.

"Are you an angel?" asked the man, with a deeper meaning than she knew, and extending his hand.

"A fur mitten angel!" smiled the woman faintly, and swayed as the outstretched hand grasped her brown fur gloved one.

"You are exhausted," exclaimed Cartwright, assured now that his baby's rescuer was not a supernatural being. "How thoughtless I have been, but you see—you looked like an angel to me!"

"Yes," assented the faint voice from the depth of the fireside chair. "I believe you. If someone restored to me the very meaning of life itself, I should—no doubt—think that one an angel." The voice faded into a whisper and the shadowy eyes closed.

Gretchen and Delia bore the light form upstairs to the guest room, dressed her in dainty night garments of Sylvia's and left her quietly to the rest which her taxed strength demanded.

Sunsets burned and stars paled in the heavens many times before the fur mitten angel, as Cartwright whimsically called her, opened her eyes knowingly upon the blossoming tributes with which her host had kept the room filled. Patricia's grandmother had arrived the morning after the baby's return, and quietly took

charge of the household and the unknown sufferer. She, as well as Cartwright and the servants, constantly marveled at the resemblance between their patient and Patricia's dead mother. But Patricia had brought her pretty Mama back and so unable was she to understand them when they tried to tell her the truth, that finally they desisted and waited for time to straighten out the tangle.

Days of slowly returning consciousness preceded the first journey down to the living-room, where the fragile convalescent sat before the bright flames, silent, until Patricia, after kissing her goodnight, had been led away by her grandmother. Then, just the breath of a sob reached Cartwright at the distant end of the room and brought him swiftly to the hearth, where he could look upon the features of this stranger, so like the ones his youthful love had idealized.

"Do—do you feel like talking a little now?" The man had asked the same question many times before. Instead of the usual answer, however, he heard the low question in return:

"What is it you would like to know?"

"Who you are and whom we may notify of your whereabouts. Your friends must be distracted."

"There is no one to worry," the woman replied dully. "And I am—why, don't you know who I am?" she asked, with a hint of mischief in her upraised eyes. "I am Miss Angel," and she smiled at Cartwright, who chivalrously forbore to cross the clearly defined line which she drew about her personality.

In the succeeding weeks, as the fur mitten angel grew stronger, she naturally and gracefully fitted into the household. There had been a great deal of urging on Cartwright's part to keep her with them as Patricia's governess, but at last his arguments, sealed with the woman's overweening love for the little girl, had triumphed over her scruples.

"I don't care who you are on the parish register," he had concluded, striding back and forth and failing to notice the woman's sudden recoil. "We know, Patty and I, that we need you and lo— and that Patty loves you. So you'll stay?" he pleaded suddenly, pausing in front of her, and she had sobbed a joyous "Yes."

Miss Angel proved herself invaluable in the important capacity of Patricia's governess. Foxhill was at first agog over her wonderful resemblance to the former mistress of the Queen Anne cottage, but it soon accepted her as a matter of course, and once more welcomed Cartwright with the old enthusiasm instead of the silent sympathy it had shown up to the time of her reception into his house.

Patricia had with difficulty been persuaded to address her new guardian as "Miss Angel" instead of "Pretty Mama," though forgetting now and then, she would revert to the better loved title. The little girl, now attained to the dignity of four years, was allowed to dine with her father and governess at six o'clock and romp after the meal till the clock struck seven. One evening the child was having so jolly a time with her grown playmates that she proved averse to the chiming command of the big clock and her father's beckoning finger.

"Hark, Patty, what does the clock say?" he asked, according to custom.

"Pat-ty-come-to-sleep-y-bye," was the prescribed answer in imitation of the chiming tone, but tonight Patty shook her curls and laughingly sped toward the door, where she wrapped one of the portieres about her.

"Patricia dear, it is time to come to bed," suggested Cartwright.

A muffled, mocking laugh came from the curtain.

"Patricia, Daddy says it is time to come to bed," he repeated a little sternly.

Another laugh seemed to demand more than words. Thinking he was still playing, Patricia laughed up in her father's face as he unwound her from the curtain's folds. When she realized, however, that he was displeased, the corners of her mouth twitched downward and with a heart-broken cry, she ran to Miss Angel calling, "Pretty Mama, Patty loves pretty Mama," and threw herself into the waiting arms. The governess lifted her and started up the stairs. A few steps and she turned.

"Will Patty kiss Daddy goodnight and say she is sorry?" she asked plaintively, nestling her cheek against the baby's yellow head.

Cartwright looked up at the words and the beautiful picture made him bound toward the stair. Reaching up his arms he gathered the two lovely faces to his own, kissed them both passionately and then turned away.

With pulses leaping and a glory in his heart which he had believed could never be rekindled, Cartwright watched the stairway for the fur mitten angel's return. He had not meant to betray himself so soon, but he was glad now, glad that she knew and that Patricia might call her "Pretty Mama" in all verity before long.

Up and down the long room he tramped, giving thanks for the Providence that had sent her to him, rejoicing in her beauty and her friendlessness, longing to possess the right to protect her against both. Her wonderful likeness to Sylvia seemed but an added claim that she was meant to belong to him and Patricia.

An hour passed and still the fur mitten angel did not descend the stairs. It never took her so long as this to put the baby to bed. Could she have been angry at his action? He rushed up to her room and softly tapped on the door. Receiving no response, he tapped louder, and then, fearing what had happened, entered the room.

The fur mitten angel had disappeared as completely as if she had been the heavenly visitor Cartwright at first thought her!

Hastily he searched the house and questioned the servants. There was no doubt but that she had gone voluntarily, wearing only the clothes she had worn when she came. Even the little Christmas token which Cartwright had given her, in Patricia's name, lay on the dresser.

It seemed a strange thing that a person who had been the head of a household such as Cartwright's could so utterly disappear as did the fur mitten angel. Borne in upon the one most deeply concerned was the fact that but a single clew was in his possession whereby he might trace her, and that merely an early picture of Sylvia in which the resemblance to the

missing governess was most marked. The photograph proved to be no aid, however, for one by one the means which Cartwright had employed to bring the fur mitten angel once more into his life were forced to admit defeat, and for the second time he faced the future with Patricia as his only companion, and this time he faced it with a sorrow and longing that had not marked the first.

Cartwright applied himself closely to business after he had given up hope of finding Miss Angel, leaving Patricia as formerly to the kindly, if not particularly intelligent ministrations of Gretchen. Her governess's morbid fear of the cold had kept the child so warmly dressed as to make her exceptionally susceptible, and it was not long before she caught a severe cold which rapidly developed into the dreaded pneumonia. A night and day nurse relieved each other in the bitterly cold room, where the doctor, aided by the sharp February air, fought for the baby's life. Cartwright seemed benumbed, wandering from room to room and asking the doctor in an absent manner each evening:

"Is there any hope, Sam?"

And each evening the doctor's answer was the same.

"While there's life, Carty. We are doing our best," and tears would blur his vision so that he had to fumble for the door knob.

But at last Doctor Sam varied his reply one twilight as he came down the stairs, the stairs which the dazed father watched so pathetically, always bearing in his heart the picture he had seen framed over its banister on that other night.

"Tonight will tell, Carty. I'm coming back and we will wait together," for the doctor feared that this apathy which had fallen upon Cartwright boded ill for the father's reason.

Upon his return, Doctor Sam did all there was to be done for the tiny sufferer, and then descended to the living-room, where he found Cartwright pacing back and forth. By the authority of his profession and friendship he soon had the unstrung man quietly conversing before the glow of the hearth fire, only occasionally glancing wildly at the slow moving clock. But when the nurse beckoned the doctor from the room, he dreaded to leave the father and hastened in order to return at the first possible moment.

When he again entered it was to lay a firm hand on the father's shoulder and say quietly:

"Carty, old man, it's all over. Patty is asleep, and I think that is what would be best for you. Shall I leave you alone?"

Cartwright nodded vacantly and Doctor Sam left him, giving orders to the servants to look in on him now and then.

Alone with the crackling fire and the ticking clock and the rush of the rising wind, Cartwright heard only the echo of Doctor Sam's words: "All over—Patty asleep." Why did Patty have to leave him, too? First Sylvia, then the fur mitten angel, and now his little daughter. Alone again, to travel up a few years to the height of his powers, and then down the long stretch ahead without a hand clasped in his, without a heart answering to his own.

He rose dazedly and stood uncertain facing the hall. Without emotion, he seemed to hear the front door open, seemed to see the portieres sway in a puff of moving air. As one in a dream, he watched a figure glide noiselessly toward the stair, saw it pause, and the face, radiant, compassionate, like that of an angel, turn slowly toward him. The man involuntarily closed his eyes, and when he opened them there was no figure on the stair.

Falling back a step, he leaned heavily on a chair and drew his hand wearily across his forehead.

"Of course—only natural—Sylvia, her mother—" he murmured disjointedly. "Yet—the expression—"

A particularly wild gust of wind beat at the windows and Cartwright started. It opened the channel of memory to the night when Patty was lost and had come back to him—but not alone. And now Patty would never come back, nor bring another with her.

Slowly he mounted to the baby's room. The door stood open and in the dim light he discerned a woman's form hovering over the bed. Softly he entered and kneeling, put his arms around the slender shoulders, turning the dream face gently toward his own.

"Are you an angel?" he whispered, and as he knew it would be, she smiled sadly, and taking his icy hand in her furry grasp, replied:

"A fur mitten angel!"

Then came the tears, mingled with broken sentences.

"They told me—and I was so afraid they wouldn't wrap her up warm, warm this bitter night—I thought I must go away—I was a nobody—but I had to bring Patty a little pair of fur mittens so she could be your fur mitten angel—too."

The father bowed his head in his hands close to the child.

"Patty darling," he sobbed, "you have brought her back to Daddy."

Suddenly tiny fingers twined in his hair and Patty's weak little voice whispered:

"Patty find pretty Mama."

With a wild leap Cartwright was on his feet and at the side of the fur mitten angel, who had withdrawn to the doorway.

"Patty—my baby—" he gasped unbelievingly, "she lives—and Sam said it was all over!"

"He meant the danger and the fear," she explained. "Life has just begun again, dear, for Patty and for—" she hesitated.

"Us," ended the man, reverently.

The Sharpened Peso

BY HAROLD DE POLO

HAT? Ah, yes, the Señor is observant—very observant. Here it is now but the second time you have done me the honor to grace my little shop and try my *cigarros*, and already you have noticed my watch charm! Ah, yes, the excellent Señor has a good palate for my wares and a quick eye for seeing things, no? And a bit curious, perhaps? Eh, a bit curious; ha, ha! It is no wonder, though; truly it is no wonder. One does not often see such a polished silver *peso* for a watch charm; no, nor one with a part of the edge so sharp, eh? As sharp as a razor, if you will look further. See, it cuts through the wood as if it were no more than—flesh! Ha, ha! Yes, no more than flesh!

"How? Ah, Señor, but you yourself should know that good things must not be approached with too much hurry; one should go easily, easily. Yes, as you story tellers always say, to begin at the beginning. Eh? *Dios*, Señor, in these small villages of my Mexico one quickly learns a stranger's business. Yes, and perhaps the Señor, being what he is, will the more be interested in my little—account. I have told it never. I do not know why I do now, but the Señor is but a passing traveller who will not make it known here. Also, Señor, have you not found that we like to get things off our souls that trouble or please us? It is strange, no? But is it not so?

"Yes, you are right, you are right. How? Oh, it was nearly a score of years ago—a long time, no? Then, Señor, I was not almost old. I was young, fresh, with a laughing face and a lighter, laughing heart. Too, I was very proud. I am but a *peon;* but even then, while still but a youth, remember, I had worked my way up from slaving in the mines at a *peso* a day to owning a little store such as this one. I had saved my money and been called a miser by my companions—but I kept silent. I had risen steadily, while they were still where they were, a *peso* a day, year in and year out; drunk from Saturday until Monday, year in and year out, nearly starving and always ragged, year in and year out!

"Yes, I had saved my money and owned my own store—and owned, too, Señor, a wife! Ah, such a wife! She was very beautiful—most tremendously beautiful—was my dear Innocencia. Tall, and lithe, and graceful, with eyes so big and black and speaking that one saw nothing else—though all her face was lovely. Yes, truly she was wonderful; and people said, Señor, that she was too good for a poor *peon*—though she was that herself—and that she should have made a good match through her beauty alone. Some wealthy old fool who wanted loveliness only or some

rich young *caballero* who would properly educate her!

"But she seemed happy with her Rafael—very happy. We were getting along nicely, putting money away and speaking of sometime having enough to get down to the big City of Mexico and open a large place—for us, I mean. Ah, and was I not happy! How pleasant were the days, working there in my little shop, making my special *cigarros*, while my sweet Innocencia stayed behind the counter and sold things. Yes, she was so pretty in her white apron and her black eyes that newcomers used to enter and make purchases just for the pleasure of seeing her more closely. Yes, we were happy—very happy!

"But one day, Señor, there passed someone who sprang from his horse and bought much, questioning Innocencia about quality and prices and such things for a much, much longer time than was necessary, I saw. At first I did not think—but he came the next day, and the next, and still the next! A very handsome and gallant young *caballero*, of the *sangre azule*, all dressed in the soft leather and gold and pearl and silver pistols of the *charro*—none other than an immensely wealthy *ranchero* whose *hacienda* was some twelve leagues distant, I learned. Then, indeed, I wondered at his daily travelling such a way to purchase my poor wares. I was perhaps even—even stupid about some things then, Señor!

"Not for long—ah, not for long! I noticed that Innocencia, too, liked it; and that they sometimes spoke in whispers. I told her, honestly, that the next time he came it were far better and wiser to tell him, courteously, that he had better purchase his *cigarros* elsewhere! She seemed surprised, but reddened; and she vowed that I was a fool for suspecting wrong—but I had heard, Señor, one or two words! I insisted gently, telling her of my great love and happiness with her and not wanting it broken. Then she laughed—I can hear it now—and patted my cheek and kissed my cheek and called me her foolish *muchacho* and agreed that maybe it *would* be better to tell the handsome Don Armando to buy his smoking things elsewhere! And I felt happier, Señor; very, very happy!

"No, he did not come again—no, not once after the next time. But what was the need, Señor? That which he had come to see and that which had meant life and all to me was not there—my Innocencia! My dear, sweet, beautiful Innocencia, who had told me, with her voice and her big eyes, how she loved her Rafael. Yes, it was a cruel blow, Señor, her running off with Don Armando—to where I knew not. I thought I should go mad—but *Dios*, for some reason, does not seem to allow those who suffer to enjoy even that much forgetfulness. Instead, Señor, I did what many others do—I took to the *pulque* and *aguardiente!*

"It seems strange, as I look back. I did not want revenge, I wanted to forget—to forget only. As you may imagine, my business soon went—pst! I sold it for a nothing and went on—on, and on, and on, down, and down, and down, drowning my body and soul and brain in drink! I, who had always saved my money and lived

cleanly and risen in the world by hard work, went down as far as one can go. Yes, in a year—even less—I was a penniless, ragged, filthy beggar, crying for coins with which to buy—drink. I, who had worked my way up to my own little shop and nice home and adored wife and people's respect!

"Yes, I am coming to it; I am there, indeed. At last, as you have guessed, I found them. Ah, but how different she was—how very different! And how different *I* was! I was then at the lowest, haunting the theatre and restaurant entrances in the City of Mexico and whining and crying a lying story for a copper or two for more *pulque* or *aguardiente!* There, one night when it was cold and I was shivering with it and the mad want of more drink, I saw them! She was on his arm, coming from the theatre, dressed like the women one sees in the newspapers—yes, like the very *Presidente's* Señora, indeed, and more beautiful than ever!

"I can remember, Señor, crawling on my hands and knees—I was then playing my legs were paralyzed—and suddenly looked up as a dazzling gown brushed against me and crying my tale of beggary. And then, for the first time, I saw them—saw *her* as my eyes went straight into her big black ones! I felt numbed and queer all over, and all I did was gasp and stare, nothing more,—stare, stare! She, too, looked and looked—*he* did not notice! I can still see the surprise on her face; and I can still see, by the sacred *Dios* above me, her lips suddenly turn into a cold and hard sneer—yes, a sneer! Then, before I knew what had happened, she had spoken to Don Armando, he had put his hand into his pocket with a laugh that chided her for noticing beggars—and she had thrown a silver *peso* at my face and entered her carriage and gone off!

"Had she passed on and said or done nothing, perhaps I would have—have forgotten! Yes, for I cared not for anything and had no respect. As it was, though, I was suddenly made fearfully and painfully sober as I clutched the *peso* and gazed at it. For the first time, anger and vengeance gripped me—a cold sort of anger, making me tremble ever so little and constantly, inside. Yes, anything else I am sure I could have forgotten—for I was weak and a drunkard—but this throwing a *peso* into my face, with that leer on her beautiful lips—the lips I had called mine and that had caused my downfall—sent me nearly wild! I wanted payment—payment, payment, that was all. To see *her* as low and miserable as she had placed *me!* Had placed me, who had loved her and been kind to her always!

"That night, creeping back to the dim alley in the old part of the city where I slept on the stones with other beggars, I suddenly felt the blood of a man come back to me. I did not sleep. I sat hunched up against a wall, thinking, thinking, thinking—and, as I thought, I fingered the silver *peso* and kept rubbing and rubbing it on the stones—ever rubbing it; ever rubbing and thinking! I was cold, hungry, thirsty, but no more did I crave the drink as I had before. The wish seemed to have all left me, as I sat there all through the night rubbing the *peso* and thinking—ever thinking! And, so much did I rub, that finally

the edge cut the tip of my finger, really deep, it was so sharp!

"I remember, as I sucked the wound and looked at the *peso*, that the thought then came to me—and madly and madly I rubbed—rubbed and rubbed, Señor, until the coin had an edge like the keenest razor, as you may very well see even now. Ah, but I was no longer hungry, no longer thirsty, as I sharpened my *peso*—the *peso* Innocencia had thrown at me in derision!

"That morning, Señor, I got work instead of begging, at my old trade of making *cigarros*—and with the money I made I did not drink. I ate—ate and hunted and saved! I did not find her at first; but I kept working and saving and sharpening my *peso*—Innocencia's *peso!* Ah, but it was sharp—sharp. You see it now, excellent Señor—but you should have seen it *then!*

"Eh? Yes, as last I saw her—some two weeks after the first time! She was leaving a restaurant at a late hour of the night—or an early one of the morning, I should say—and she was dressed more gorgeously than even the last time and looking even more beautiful! Yes, very beautiful, with her big, inky eyes. It was her one thing—her beauty—without it she would be—pst, nothing! Softly, without being seen, I crept up and fondled my *peso!* I did not let her see me. All I did, as I sprang forward and slashed out with the coin, was to whisper that it was her Rafael who had done it and that he would see her sometime later—when she needed him. Yes, that it was her Rafael who had brought the sharpened *peso* across her face in a manner that would spoil one of her wonderful eyes and leave a horrible mark forever! There was a shriek, a rushing of the crowd, and I was safely away!

"Yes, Señor, that is why I wear my watch charm, for it has memories—memories! Eh? Ah, yes, I was a man after that; for I worked hard and saved my money and in a year or two came to a new town and bought this little shop! Eh, my Innocencia? Ah, my good and kind Señor, but you are not *quite* as observant as I at first thought!

"Come, woman—come. *Dios*, creature, leave thy work of cleaning the front of the house and come and dust the doorway so that the illustrious Señor may pass out fittingly—and be careful, woman, that thou show only the good side of thy face! Yes, thou should remember that; for people do not like to look at ugly things—no, people do not like to look at ugly things, as thou well have found out!"

A Mole From Frisco

BY H. P. HOLT

NOBODY would ever have dreamed of questioning Slim Grogan's right to be in the Hotel Regale. He had studied the fine art of appearance until he had raised it to a science. The clothes he wore had cost him quite a scandalous number of dollars and he was as perfectly groomed as a human being could well be. Some people invest their capital in a lavish suits of offices with the laudable intention of cajoling other people's wealth. Others attain the same object by keeping an expensively furnished home and performing such feats of financial jugglery as unloading worthless stock on their rich friends. Slim merely clad himself in fine raiment, guided in taste unerringly by memories of early days when his outward appearance was more a matter of *principle* than *principal* to him.

He was a long way from the stage when either a mortal or an immortal can hope to wear a halo justly, for those who would sit on life's cushioned places and who toil not neither do they spin, must of necessity tread on very thin legal ice occasionally, if not always. Slim realized that he was on this earth for a limited period only and he studiously sought to make the most of the opportunity according to his own notions. He had no conscience whatever concerning individual rights to property. That was just a kink in his brain. The kink had cost him a career in a bank in his early youth before he had learned the elementary rules of taking things without leaving a trail. It almost deprived him of his liberty on that occasion for a more of less lengthy period, but banking concerns do not leap at publicity of that order and so he was softly ushered out into a cold and chilly world without the remotest idea how to earn a living, or the faintest intention of finding out how it is done.

Slim did not in the least look like a criminal as he sat in the smoke room of the Hotel Regale. He might have been a millionaire waiting for a friend, or he might have been anyone else who had a right to sit there. In reality, he was extremely hungry, having missed two consecutive meals owing to circumstances over which he had no control. The cigar he was smoking was a mockery, but even millionaires have queer tastes in cigars sometimes. There was somebody's overcoat, thrown carelessly over the back of a lounge seat, that looked as though it might help a needy man to raise the price of the good things for which his frame was crying out; but such methods did not appeal to Slim Grogan. After all, he was an artist at his own game, and it would have been an insult to accuse him of petty pilfering. Every man has his standard excepting the one who drops a cent in the blind beggar's can and lifts out a nickle.

Though Slim held in front of him an evening paper and appeared to be immersed in its contents, his brain was concentrated on the task of taking stock of his surroundings. The Regale was a palatial establishment. He had visited it before, equally informally, with the sole idea of taking his bearings. When the moment seemed opportune he threw away his cigar, yawned as if bored to death, and made for the lift. He was deposited on the eighth floor and walked slowly along the corridor without allowing anything in his demeanour to indicate the fact that one of the crucial moments in his tempestuous career was at hand. The worst of it was, from his point of view, he had no clear notion what lay in front of him. All he sought was an opportunity. The rest would have to depend on his mental agility and good fortune.

There came a silken rustle a little ahead of him. A woman who had come from a room walked past him. For a fraction of a second he allowed his eyes to dwell on the door and, with great joy, he realized that it was still slightly open. Making a lightning calculation, he decided that it was an affair that would have to be carried out within the space of sixty seconds. As the rustle went round a corner he swung back and pushed the door ajar.

There was nothing worthy of his delicate attention on the dressing table excepting a purse, and that he crammed into his pocket for luck. Instinct and training took him to the proper places to search. He found nothing and fifteen seconds had shot past. One chance remained. His long, thin fingers stole under the pillow and the hard lines down the side of his mouth relaxed a little as he touched a box. When a woman, stopping temporarily at a hotel, puts a box under a pillow it usually contains something more interesting than bonbons.

Twenty-five seconds had elapsed. The box had just been drawn out and Slim was due to be back in the corridor on time, when the silken rustle returned abruptly.

If the owner of those skirts had been ugly, or even ordinary looking, the man would probably have acted and acted quickly. As it was, he stared at her almost stupidly.

She stood in the doorway, tall and slender, like an unconscious queen. Her eyes had that peculiar quality in their amber hue that holds men firmer than steel chains. There had never been a moment in Slim's life when it was more imperative for him to speak, and it was his silence now that accused him as nothing else could have done. The woman preserved her *sang froid* perfectly. Without a trace of fear, she advanced a step, holding out a hand.

"I will take that," she said, referring to the box, and Slim allowed her to relieve him of his burden. The tension was becoming more than he could bear with comfort. Had she uttered the word "thief," or looked scornful, he would have felt it gave him some sort of an opening. As it was, his only desire was for a pit to open through the eight floors beneath him and swallow him up decently. To raise his hat and bow himself out of the room seemed the thing to do, and

yet he stood, mesmerized. Her eyes were boring like gimlets into his very soul.

"Why did you do this?" she asked at last, after taking in every detail of his appearance, from the crown of his head to the sole of his boots, with one comprehensive glance.

"I—" he began, and then he realized that untruths would serve no purpose here. As a matter of fact, he could not think of an adequate invention, and he knew she would not believe any concocted story. He laughed slightly. Why not tell her the truth?

"It may sound odd to one in your set," he said gravely, "but I was hungry. It is nearly evening and I have not yet had breakfast.

The woman's expression remained as immobile as marble. If the man's explanation had touched a chord anywhere within her, she showed no trace of it.

"You were taking a great risk," she said.

"Yes, the risk of starving to death," he answered. "It seems idiotic, in the circumstances, for me to make such a remark now, but I am sorry I did this. I also took your purse. Here it is."

The woman accepted it like an automaton.

"Is this the first time you have—have descended to such a thing?" she asked. Her tone was still noncommital, but he fancied he detected a remote tinge of sympathy in her face.

"It is," he replied, with an inward prayer that she would believe him. "I hope it may be the last. My fate, you see, is in your hands."

"In what way?"

"If you call the police, the chances are that I shall be forced into doing things similar to this all my life."

"And if I do not call the police?"

Slim's heart gave a gleeful bound. A man will say most things to avoid the penitentiary, but he was not stirred altogether by such motives. It was quite eight years since he had known the influence of any good woman. He felt a curious sensation in the region of the fifth rib. Had the circumstances been altogether different he would have described it as something very like a case of love at first sight. This statuesque specimen of femininity could have twisted him round her little finger like wet string. Perhaps she knew it. A woman is quick to discern such symptoms.

"If you decide to do that I assure you most solemnly I shall never land myself in such a tangle again," he said; and the curious part about it was that he really wished he meant it. But Slim knew Slim.

"Have you no friends who could help you?"

He smiled a wry smile, but hid it quickly.

"I have none to whom I could look for assistance," he said.

The woman's position was difficult, now that she had unbent to the extent of asking personal questions. Socially there could be little or no difference between them, save for the conclusive argument that she had found him with her precious box in his hand. Had he been down at heel, or shifty eyed, an icy lecture on the ethics of personal possessions might have been easy. But he was by no means ill at ease and he was a handsome creature.

"I hope my judgment is not at fault," she said slowly, holding him spellbound with her wonderful eyes, but I fancy this will be a grim lesson to you. Go!" She extended her hand, pointing toward the door. The slender fingers were within a few inches of him. He bowed, and then, acting on a queer impulse, dropped on one knee, raising her hand to his lips. If he had not been an attractive scoundrel, she might have dragged her fingers away and stormed, but his action was carried out with an irreproachable air of good breeding, and a moment later he was making for the entrance of the Regale, his emotions singularly jumbled.

He was so absorbed in his own thoughts that he did not notice a man on the sidewalk nod to him slightly as he stepped out into Fifth Avenue. The man was Lefty Cobb, whose chief and most profitable art consisted of writing other people's signatures according to pattern. The chill air on Slim's temples refreshed him after his ordeal and he decided to walk to his flat. He seemed to be treading on moonbeams and, such is the effect of a woman's eyes at times, mundane hunger had left him. Slim was not even thinking of his lucky escape. By piecing two and two together the police would have been able to make him an extremely sorry man, for once he landed into their clutches there was no knowing what they might find out, and there were a variety of incidents in Slim's secret history which it would have caused him pain to discuss with the police. All he was concerned with on his way homeward was a beautiful fairy, tall and slender as a lily, whom he was doomed to worship from afar during the rest of his days. Of course, it was a preposterous position for him to have been caught in, still, that was his punishment. Six months ago he had stood to win a large fortune if only a horse called Pippin had not knelt down half way round the course. Now, if only Pippin had—

Bah! He asked himself whether he were going crazy. If so, crazy men were to be envied, for it was a most enjoyable process.

In his flat he lit a pipe and dwelt in a land of dreams until sheer hunger drove him out into certain haunts which were not frequented by the highest society, though in its own way the company was select.

One could always depend on a good meal there at the expense of those with whom one did shady business. The other fellow never quite knew when he might be in need of a Samaritan. In this case the other fellow was Leftie Cobb, who gave Slim the glad eye and a porterhouse steak. A quarter of an hour later they were both comfortable and chatty.

"Saw you this afternoon coming out of the Regale," said Lefty, "but you were up in the clouds and didn't notice me. I thought perhaps you'd been doing business with the Duke. He went in as you came out."

Slim shook his head.

"They say the Duke always works alone," he replied, casting his mind back over what he knew of that elegant's record. The Duke's speciality was acquiring the jewels of wealthy but careless folk in places like hotels.

"Um-m! They say so," agreed Lefty, "but that's where he will score one day when trouble comes hopping

his way. He always travels with a partner and hands the stuff over to her the minute he gets his fingers on it."

"A woman, eh?" observed Slim.

"Yes, and a peach at that. She looks like a duchess. Big amber eyes that get you fixed and a face that reminds you of angels playing harps. They stop at the best hotels as if they were strangers to each other, but I spotted them putting their heads together some months since. I've seen her years ago, somewhere. If I'm not mistaken she's a party that used to be known by the name of Frisco Kate, but she looks different, togged up as she is now."

"There are lots of faces that look very much alike," remarked Slim in a queer voice.

"So," agreed Lefty reflectively, blowing rings of cigar smoke. "All the same I'd like to have a peek at the back of her left hand."

"Why?"

"If she's Frisco Kate there is a mark there like a very large mole, right in the centre."

"Of course, that would settle it," said Slim absently. He had kissed that mole.

A few moments later he got up abruptly and went out into the night, there to seek distraction by rubbing shoulders in the stream of humanity.

The Return of Sandy

BY ROY FREEMAN MUNGER

THE parade ground of the Fourteenth Regiment was baked to a dead dull brown by the Arizona sun. The valley of the Rio Grande was a streaked yellowish unwholesome brown and the hot air above it was brown, too. The khaki tents drooped dispiritedly on their limp guy ropes and the big tanned troopers beneath them were lolling and dozing through the afternoon heat. Even the Stars and Stripes on the tall flag pole hung limply in richly colored folds.

Quartermaster Davis sat on his cot and thought so hard that the sweat drops rolled off his forehead. Between thoughts he cursed originally and piquantly after the fashion of the cavalry.

In Buck Davis's rollicking cowboy days he had made love, with all the ardor of his somewhat ardent personality, to Katharine, familiarly known as "Sandy" Parsons, the daughter of Ben Parsons, whose farms, stores and cattle interests were strung through four states. Arriving at the marriageable age, Buck's pride had bitten him deeply, and torn by the promptings of what he could not down and would not show, he had thrown up his foremanship and fled to the welcoming arms of the hard-riding Fourteenth. And now Sandy was there across the river, stubbornly trying to save the Parsons warehouse out of the wreck of vandalism, while another day would see Zatara's ragamuffins raiding down the valley. Minor annoyances were, one: The fact that he, Buck, was ordered on a two days' journey for the purchase of regimental supplies; two: The very harsh order which had been promulgated against any meddling by soldiers in the fracas across the river.

Bathed in sweat, with the hot wind blowing a stream of dust through the slit of his tent door, he railed at his Fates with the choice invective of a man who has been forced by years of trying situations to develope a psychic safety valve. Having thus deprived wrath of all its emotion, his mind began to work under high pressure.

He first called in Bainbridge, his chum, and, with restless fingers beating a tattoo on the table, explained the necessity for the journey of a dummy quartermaster to Camp Wilson. Bainbridge assented noncommittally to a deception involving disgrace and dismissal and went out to arrange for his leave of absence.

While Bainbridge was out, Davis rolled his civilian suit into a haversack, wrote a note to his striker to forward all mail to Camp Wilson and oiled his automatic carefully.

At twilight, the two men rode out of camp together, but it was Bainbridge who took the main trail. Davis changed his clothes, stuffed his uniform into the haversack and drift-

ed away to a little known ford on the Rio Grande *del norte*.

The plan of a marauding chief is a capricious thing. Zatara, marching by easy stages and plundering and burning by the way, should have reached the practically undefended town of Montemaras on the third day. But it needed no more than a hint, a whisper that all was not as it seemed, a suspicion that his rival just over the border, though arrested and re-arrested by the United States secret service men, was plotting to some effect, and the lazy cruelty of success was changed instantly to the ferocity of conflict. The deep dry turquoise of the night sky was barely shading into a sickly blue grey, when the first crescendo of thudding hoofs roused the sleeping town of Montemaras to a whirl of blazing buildings and crashing weapons. Shooting, rushing and prowling, and dirty, reckless invaders swarmed everywhere, while above the screams, shot and explosions, rose the hammering roll of galloping horses as the irregular cavalry poured down the central street.

Sandy Parsons was standing with her chin against one of the barred upper windows of the warehouse watching the burning curacil across the road send up pale flames against the ash grey eastern sky. A rifle leaned against the window grating beside her, and the gun belt, slung over her riding skirt, carried a grim reality that bore no resemblance to the picturesqueness of the Wild West show. As she watched, a heavily built American stepped out of the smoke-swirled dawn shadows and stood looking up at the warehouse. A sniper down the road opened on him with a rifle. He drew his automatic with a smooth forward hunch of the shoulder, winged the sniper, and leaped back into the shadows. With the easy certainty with which one follows a familiar mind, Sandy picked her way through the heaped-up obscurity to where a narrow door opened on a yet undisturbed side street. Davis came in heavily, bulking large in the darkness and breathing deeply.

"Thanks, Buck," said Sandy. "All organized?"

"Army gun," said Buck. "Building fireproof? Lead me upstairs." In that warehouse, among the farm supplies, were two thousand rifles shipped in by the insurrecto agents. Zatara's men could find use for those rifles and supplies very easily and no sooner was the town overrun than horsemen urged a mule train up to the Parsons warehouse. The operation seemed simple, but it was unfortunate for the planners that the first thunderous blows of a pinion log on the corrugated door should have coincided with the advent of Buck and Sandy at the front windows. Hemmed by sheer walls on one side and the burning curacil on the other, dimmed by acrid wood smoke and raked by the fire of two repeaters, the narrow street became a shifting inferno of plunging horses, panic-stricken pack mules and frantic troopers. For over a minute the hail and turmoil lasted. Then the street cleared; the attackers retired, to post themselves in cover and rain bullets into every window and crevice of the building. Buck tore off a length of surgeon's tape and pulled together the edges of a furrow on his

left arm. Sandy felt her way to a box and sat down. A bullet, nicking the window ledge, had almost blinded her with dust, but she had kept on firing in the direction of the meleé. Between them they had emptied forty-eight shells and Buck surveyed the littered street with interest. Then he fired twice at a writhing horse, reloaded the automatic with his last clip, lit a cigarette and began to open a packing case of rifles and ammunition. Ten minutes later Sandy got the dust out of her eyes and came over and sat on the packing case where she could watch the street without being seen.

"Better blow north in the heat of the afternoon," suggested the worker. "They won't expect a break then and we'll sift easier than after they've trippled the curb warmers at sundown."

"I need this warehouse," objected Sandy.

"What for?" retorted Buck. "It's nothing to you and you'll make a shocking homely corpse. Honest, you won't be a bit pretty."

"I'm bust," explained Sandy. "This place is all there is left." Buck named his state of mind as surprised purple verging on heliotrope. "You know—poor old Dad—he was scrapping the syndicate—well, I expect the failure was what killed him as much as anything."

"And you're hanging on to what's left," said Buck soberly.

Sandy smiled wryly.

"What would you expect me to do? Teach school?"

Buck pryed off the last board, hauled out a case of rifles and loaded twenty of them, set a pot of beans on the gas stove and the beleaguered twain settled themselves comfortably and sat quietly waiting for trouble.

Major Norton, the grizzled commanding officer of the encamped troops, opposite Montemaras, was not accustomed to a waiting game. As "Jump" Norton, in the last of the Indian wars, he had gained his soubriquet among men who are not usually addicted to compliment. In the wearing Philippine campaigns, his driving attacks, delivered with mathematical precision the instant his forces were fully deployed, had won many a battle before his superiors had even decided to engage. To his mind, the administration policy of watchful waiting meant nothing more than a reluctance to bring on a general engagement. Across the river, an American citizen of some standing, the daughter of his old friend Parsons, was being attacked in the defense of her property. All day, through the smoke and stray bullets, he watched the one-sided conflict. The warehouse, solid and fireproof, could only be entered by battering in the doors or prying off the steel shutters, and these the fire from the upper windows seemed ample to prevent. A silence fell as the red-streaked yellow of the sunset sky faded bit by bit into ultramarine of wide starry spaces. Twice the Major turned to give an order, and twice he checked himself, and waited. During the night the inferno broke out again, while a series of attacks were frustrated, well nigh destroyed, in the light of kerosene flares thrown from the windows.

The morning dawned hot and still. Bugles shrilled in the American camp, the sunrise gun was fired, Old Glory ran up the flagstaff, the horses were watered by sweating troopers and all the orderly routine of camp life went forward. The thousand breakfast fires of Zatara's men rose from the streets of the plundered town. The sun slid up, over and down. Not a shot broke the stillness of the blackened squares, but from every bridge and ford came a crowd of fugitives fleeing the agents of a man who had learned cruelty from the under side.

The velvet night, mighty and drifting, was marred only by spiteful winking of irregular many-eyed campfires and a blood-red glow on the horizon, that told of the spreading fingers of the foragers. Zatara was waiting for a column which had been left behind in the haste of his advance. At ten o'clock the next morning, the line of bedraggled field artillery plodded into sight followed by a long train of ammunition wagons which carried the one essential of the raiders.

It was an evil moment for Captain Ventena when he suspected a peon named Pedro of having rifles concealed in his abode shack. While Pedro parleyed, Pedro's wife slipped across the bridge with the guns hidden in a rough hand cart. By the time the information was tortured out of Pedro, the woman was nearly across, Ventena, cold with anger, pursued at a headlong gallop. Almost instantly, the pursuit came into collision with Angus Martin, sentry at the American end of the bridge. Ventena's blood flared; he shot Martin and sabered the peon woman, the wife of Pedro.

Major Norton, reckless of his own career and with a vision of old Ben Parsons before his eyes, had begun to mobilize his men at the first sight of the artillery. At this last outrage, his tentative plans burst out in quick snapped volcanic commands and before the first badly aimed shell had burst through the roof of the warehouse, Ventena's crew were smashed like flies as two companies of the Fourteenth tore across the bridge and spread fanwise to cover its approaches. Behind them raced line after line of infantry at double quick, while the cavalry camp, galvanized by "Boots and Saddles," vomited a torrent of hurrying, hot-blooded troopers. Zatara was not caught napping. His men were ready and brimming with "gringo hate." But at best they were only irregular and badly mounted cavalry. With swift, hammer-like charges, they were driven back by stubborn, straight shooting infantrymen who never retreated from a position once taken, and never took a position they did not mean to hold.

The Mexican artillery succeeded in landing only three shells on the bridge (out of fifteen attempts) before they were forced back by the advancing line. Braced by hurrying re-enforcements and urged by the drumming of machine guns, the infantry carried the Stars and Stripes forward along two horns of a crescent until only the Mexican center held against the impact. Through the sweat and smoke-haze and the rush of hand-to-hand fighting, the two horns pressed slowly inward. Then the center opened wide and through the cheering ranks swept that rarest and most glorious of war

spectacles, a smashing cavalry charge.

Two squares ahead of it, around the corner of the Parsons warehouse, galloped Quartermaster Buck Davis, miraculously returned from his trip in the nick of time; Buck Davis, jamming his heels into the ribs of a naked bronco and heading straight for the unlimbering batteries. In each hand was a stick of giant blasting powder, the fuses sputtering as he rode. The first stick struck end on and put out the fuse, but the second exploded just off the ground and wrecked the battery. Davis, miraculously unhit, kept straight on into the meleé, dove headlong from his horse, rolled under an ammunition wagon, came out on the far side, and ducked beneath the belly of a kicking horse, under the erratic fire of several frantic artillerymen.

The artillerymen vanished, disappeared, were blotted out as the charging American cavalrymen swept through like a crashing, lightning-flecked tornado.

Buck crouched by the ammunition wagon until the last horse had passed. Then he sighed and walked slowly back to the warehouse. The fighting was over. The four companies of the Fourteenth Cavalry had smashed their way from the center of the crescent to the unfilled gap between its horns, and white flags were sprouting like mushrooms in their wake.

By the time when the long afternoon shadows began to merge into the coolness of sunset, the following events had taken place. Zatara had been taken to an American jail for instigating the murder of Angus Martin, the sentry killed at the bridge. His troops had been disarmed and disbanded. The outlying fragments of his army had scattered voluntarily to the four winds. Major Norton had reported by telegraph and been commended "for prompt action under unusual circumstances" and instructed to restore order and withdraw. Quartermaster Davis had been recommended for promotion for distinguished gallantry in action.

Sandy was upstairs in the warehouse checking up vouchers. Downstairs a stiff and spruce West Pointer was doling out farm supplies to the returning refugees. Buck came upstairs and pretended to look over her shoulder.

"How do you come out?" he asked.

"Counting the outstanding bills as nothing and the land and buildings as minus nothing, which they are about worth, I just break even."

"That's good," said Buck. "Do you think you could help me run the circle X Ranch?"

"Point one," retorted Sandy: "What have you got to do with the Circle X? Point two: Who said I was going to help you do anything?"

"Point one," said Buck: "I can get the Circle X on half shares and my enlistment is up next month. Point two: You're subpœnaed. This paper is a marriage license."

Sandy read the license through word by word. Then she put it down and relapsed into silence. Buck did not stir. After half an hour Sandy spoke half tenderly, half amusedly.

"That's a good idea of yours, Buck. Got a preacher?"

"He's downstairs," said Buck promptly.

"Let's go find him," said Sandy.

The Purse

BY MICHAEL WHITE

PRINGLE was searching the pavement of a crowded street. A few moments before he had taken a purse and a penknife out of a pocket. In opening a stiff blade he slipped the purse.

"I guess it's no use hunting for it here," he decided finally. "Too bad! Hate to part from that old purse. Seem to have got the losing habit. Second thing within twenty-four hours!"

So he thrust the knife back in his pocket, with the air of a man who brings reason to bear on a bit of ill-luck.

Meanwhile a girl of attractive presence had passed Pringle by and discovered the purse—a small, unpretentious, much worn leather object; just such a purse as a well-to-do man of past middle age with an attachment for things of long association might carry. She impulsively stooped for the purse, but it was snatched from under her well-fitting gloved hand. She lifted her eyes to encounter the fixed gaze of a very old woman. The contrast between the two was striking. In countenance, poise and manner, the girl emphasized the buoyancy, frankness and hope of youth; in the old woman's shriveled bent figure, wrinkled skin and hard, suspicious glance, lay a plain statement of vain dreams left far behind and a sole abiding comfort in money. To this, her rusty black garments and an antique bonnet perched sideways, added savings bank testimony; even as the girl's fresh, carefully thought-out attire, bespoke a faithful response to the beguiling whisperings of Kismet. The girl was evidently surprised at the suddenness with which the purse had been whisked into another's possession, the old woman clearly exercising her wit on retaining it. She grasped the purse tightly in thin, rheumatic fingers, with lips moving convulsively as if from a habit of talking with herself.

"It's not your purse—not yours," she snapped defiantly in a cracked voice.

This broke the slight spell in which the girl was held.

"Oh, no, of course not," she spontaneously replied. "I didn't think of claiming it. I—I am glad you recovered your purse before someone appropriated it."

She nodded, smiled pleasantly, and went on her way. The old woman stared after her with a curious expression of mingled cunning, greed and timidity, tucking the purse away in a fold of her shawl. Presently she was moved by a sudden impulse to creep swiftly into the wide portals of a department store. She plunged into the main aisle at an hour fairly thronged, to thrust a devious way in and out, as if endeavoring to lose herself from a chance of the girl hastening after with a challenging:

"Madam, I have discovered that that is not your purse." Her fingers were twined around it securely. To the resulting pressure it surely felt as if a tight wad of bills lay within. Her yearning to gaze upon them became a haunting obsession, but she was fearful of doing so before numerous seeing eyes. The rightful owner might be at hand and recognize his property. After some hesitation, she determined on a definite course. She quickened her pace through the store until she came to an exit into a rear street. Here passenger traffic was infrequent, and no one likely to observe her actions. With trembling, nervous fingers, she unhooked the clasp of the purse. As she brought it within close range of vision, her expression was intense in its eager anticipation. For a moment she poked around the interior with a crooked finger. Then fell upon her a look of disappointment so keen that it was almost pitiful. Never were disgust and chagrin written plainer on a human face. She gave vent to an imprecation, flung the purse downward, and set her foot upon it. This action served to again close the hasp. Then she sped onward with features grimly set, muttering to herself.

But, lounging up against a wall, a street loafer had casually watched the old woman. Since her back was toward him he had merely seen the purse fall. For all he knew she might have been counting over a week's hard earnings. This, however, in no wise entered into his ethics. He swooped down on the purse, grabbed it, and strode jauntily in the opposite direction. The purse certainly felt good to him. Thus he came to where a saloon in the block presented the lure of many beers. He chuckled as he wrenched open the purse and dropped his gaze within. But only for a second. Then he swore bitterly. He crushed the purse in his fist. With a wide sweep of his arm he tossed it contemptuously from him; whereupon he swung in at the saloon doors.

Meanwhile, the purse hit a cartwheel, hopped here and there a bit, and finally landed at the base of a water hydrant. Now beside the hydrant stood a policeman, and the purse found a resting place close to the heels of Officer 7301. The policeman was absorbed in directing a trim serving maid, so he failed to notice the advent of the purse. A wayfarer was more observant. He ran eagerly toward it, but impulsively drew back when the policeman's eye fell on him. For a space he appeared undecided. Evidently a desire to secure the purse rose above the strictly moral code, since, to be sure, finding a purse is not precisely thieving. But it required more than ordinary temerity to snatch a purse from the heels of a policeman and make off with it. Yet he coveted that purse. So he retired to a strategic position under the awning of a grocery and, with gaze fixed on the purse, devoutly wished Officer 7301 would move on. The situation was distressing. In five minutes the wayfarer was due in an office where a promising job was offered, yet there was the fat little purse for anyone's gathering. But, alas! there, also, was Officer 7301, six feet tall and forty-two chest measurement, unconsciously guarding it. He waited, cor-

dially anathematizing Officer 7301.

In a little, around the block came Pringle. He had stopped to chat with a friend, which delayed him in minor business on the side street. He thus arrived at the hydrant. He paused, let his eyes fall, and saw his purse. Without hesitation he stooped and recovered his property. At the same time, the policeman's hand grasped his shoulder.

"Hello!" cried Officer 7301. "What's going on here? Found a purse, eh!"

"That's all right," replied Pringle. "It's my purse, and I'm going to keep it."

Officer 7301 overhauled Pringle visually and shook his head. It was a nervy attempt, but rather thin work.

"What are you giving me?" he sharply questioned. "I saw you coming—'way off—from the other street. You weren't hunting anything. You haven't passed here before since I've been on post."

"All the same," asserted Pringle, "it's my purse."

Here the wayfarer came out from under the awning to refute Pringle with testimony less than more veracious. He couldn't stand seeing a crook get away with that purse. Never!

"See here, Officer," at last said Pringle, "if I tell you exactly what is in the purse, will that settle it?"

"Well—maybe so," he replied.

"Only a plug of tobacco," informed Pringle. "The old leather case keeps it moist—just as I like it. Had the purse now for a good many years."

He opened the purse to prove the truth to his statement.

Officer 7301 glanced in the purse and nodded. The wayfarer also saw and cursed his own particular brand of foolishness in jeopardizing the chance of a good job. He scuttered away. That left only Pringle. He began again where the thing started. He sought his penknife and sliced the tobacco for use in the usual habit. He moved on a few paces, then halted to re-examine the purse, for in returning it to his pocket his fingertips had clasped a small hard object jammed tightly in one corner. Presently he extracted it. The object was rolled in soft paper. He removed the paper, and his face became suddenly exuberant. In his hand lay a crystal scintillating many fires.

"Well—I'll be hanged—if I'm not in considerable luck!" he ejaculated. "So here's where I put the diamond that came out of Maria's ring. Could have sworn I slipped it in my pocketbook. Been hunting for it everywhere. Pretty fuss she'd have made had it been a total loss. Guess I'm in two hundred dollars."

A Fortunate Accident

BY ARTHUR L. CHRISTIAN

LIFE is a field of varied experiences. To have reached the very pinnacle of success and then to be brought down to the ordinary plane of existence is a most unenviable situation, but one which I was called upon to face in a most unexpected manner. Feeling the full glory of my achievement as a writer and stimulated with my successes, I did not realize I had been gradually undermining a naturally strong constitution, until I found myself the victim of an illness which for months incapacitated me for any effort whatever. After a time I began to regain my physical vigor, but felt no corresponding advance in the creative power of my mind.

I spent some time traveling in foreign countries and with new and varied scenes before me, I endeavored to resume my writing, but soon found my work did not come up to its former standard. This was more fully impressed upon me by the return of my manuscripts from publishers who had formerly been eager for my contributions.

Finding no improvement in my condition and with the knowledge that my finances were considerably depleted, I decided to return to my native country, hoping the sight of old friends and familiar scenes might enable me to throw off the inertia with which I was possessed.

Several weeks passed with no marked change in my condition, and with my means growing limited I found myself lingering over the gambling table, a habit I had acquired in an endeavor to while away some of the tedious hours which fall to the lot of a semi-invalid far removed from home and friends.

Being an indifferent, though somewhat lucky player, I was easily drawn to these places of amusement, but finally realizing into what debasing influences I was drifting, on the evening of which I write, I left my companions, resolving that this would be my last visit to such a place.

I stepped out into the warm, damp night with a feeling of loneliness and depression. I sauntered down the crowded street with the one desire ever present within me, that something might occur to rouse in me one of those inspirations when one's mind works automatically and one's pen writes with hesitancy.

Enveloped in my thoughts, I had not noticed that a crowd was gathering in front of me until I was wrapped in its midst. That some sort of an accident had occurred was evident, and though I pushed forward with fully as much eagerness as the others, I arrived upon the scene only in time to see the big grey ambulance roll away.

"Fellow hit by auto," I heard someone remark. "Dead—I guess."

A new thought was born within me

and I felt a sense of shamefulness come over the countenance of my tired mind for letting myself be so thoroughly crushed by the simple need of money. What was this fight for money in comparison to the fight for life, such as the person so recently rushed to the hospital would have to contend with had he not already lost that chance.

I was not aware of the nature of my present surroundings and was only awakened to the realization that I was in the neighborhood of the Central Terminal, by the clanging of bells, the shrill whistlings and puffings of the locomotives. I walked through the waiting room into the interior of the station. The crowds from the incoming trains and departing trains interested me.

It was a moment or two before I was able to find a vacant seat, which was the end one in the very corner, and here I settled myself to study the faces of the constant stream of travelers; in my own mind, originating the reasons why he or she were leaving the city, if the young couple were merely brother or sister or really honeymooners, and such thoughts that were none of my affair yet interested me.

On my left sat a middle-aged man, his head dropped forward and from his open mouth came an occasional snore. With the mental observation that he was probably a weary drummer, I again turned my attention to the crowds.

Suddenly, I felt the person on my left give a quick, snoring gasp, and jumping to his feet, with a firm grip on my arm, he exclaimed in a very excited voice, "Thank God, Mr. Van Court! you are still here. I didn't intend to go to sleep."

Catching up his suit case with one hand, he placed his right arm around my shoulders and, with a supporting hold, raised me to a standing position.

"We have only two minutes," he continued, glancing at the station clock. "Come on." He jerked me through the crowd toward the gates leading into the concourse.

In the meantime, I was turning many things over in my mind. Undoubtedly he had mistaken me for the person accompanying him before he had fallen asleep. Would I be wise in carrying out the person's part?

The gateman punched his two tickets and, with the same supporting hold, he helped me along to the entrance of the second Pullman. We were no sooner aboard than the wheels began to move and I wondered what the outcome of such an undertaking would be. The porter, after looking at our tickets, picked up the suitcase and preceded us to a private compartment at the end of the car.

My companion, instead of telling me to be seated, placed me upon the lower berth and proceeded to unpack the suit case. It seemed utterly impossible to keep still any longer and I could not restrain a "Well—I'll be damned!" which seemed to just fit the occasion.

"That's the first time I have heard you speak, Mr. Van Court. Now for your medicine and we'll turn in."

He pulled forth a pair of pink pajamas, a bottle and a tablespoon.

"Just a swallow of this now," he remarked, holding the bottle up and

cocking his head on one side as he filled the spoon. "This ought to be about the last you will have to take."

Whoever this Mr. Van Court might be, he was either an idiot or a helpless fool; for after my friend had replaced the bottle in the suit case, he returned to me and, getting down on his knees, took off my shoes. Helping me to my feet, he took off all my clothing and dressed me in the pink pajamas.

Long into the night I lay there wondering what would be the outcome of this strange performance. The motion of the rushing train, as it thundered over the rails, lulled me into a restless sleep. My mind seemed to have regained all its imagining power; for the time being my dreams were exaggerated and horrible.

I was awakened at six by my companion, who was already dressed. "Morning, ole top," he cried and I nearly forgot myself, but I managed to ward off a reply with a cough.

He had lost none of his attentiveness during the night for he dressed and even shaved me. It was soon evident that we would not breakfast on the train for he packed the suitcase and gave me my hat.

"Green River," called the porter, rapping on the door, "your baggage?"

My attendant gave him the suitcase and slipping his arm through mine we went out into the vestibule. The train drew up before the small brick station of Green River which, with a store and a few houses, made up the village.

A young man dressed in a khaki suit sprang forward from the group of spectators.

"Good morning, Mr. Van Court," he shouted, running across the platform. "Glad to see you, sir. The car is back of the station."

He took the suitcase and we followed him around the building where stood an Oldsmobile.

"Is everything in readiness, my boy?" asked my companion, as we were speeding out of the little town.

"You call me James," answered the driver. "Yes—I guess everything will be ready. The men were trying to catch the bull when I left the barn."

We were spinning on through the beautiful morning over the picturesque landscape. Strange as it may seem, I had not once thought of being frightened and was intensely enjoying the mystery of it all. The farm lands were soon far below us as we ascended into the green foothills.

On the summit of one of these great green mounds, I saw a building and, as we drew nearer, it took the form of a large stone house. It reminded me of the old Manors in England that I had pictured when a boy in my English history class. There was the mansion, or lord's house, on the very hilltop, and around the foot were buildings, most likely the homes and barns of the laborers.

The conversation having ceased, I was eager to reach the big grey residence which, naturally, though I know not why, seemed our intended destination; for I thought once there the mystery concerning my night's journey would be revealed.

We turned from the main road at the foot of the hill and continued on a circling drive, up, up, until we were at the very entrance of the beautiful home.

The two great doors were swung

open and, leaning against the casing of one, I saw the slender figure of a girl. During my life I had seen many beautiful women. In my writing I had pictured them far more beautiful than any I had ever seen. But this fair girl, framed in the shadowy doorway, was endowed with a beauty of which I had never dreamed.

So entranced was I, that it was impossible for me to employ the slightest forms of gentlemanly manner, for I gazed most rudely and it is probable she withdrew within the depths of the dark hall from sheer embarrassment. However, this did not trouble me and the vision only added to the strength of my interest and anxiety.

"James," said my companion, helping me out, "tell Mr. and Mrs. Van Court and Miss Marion to keep out of sight."

With his arm through mine, he led me to the door, where we were met by a maid whom we followed up the open stairway into a great airy bedchamber. It was very spacious and Colonial-like. The ceiling was high and large windows made up the outer wall. The paper was blue and here and there on the floor were art rugs of the same color. In the corner stood a grand old mahogany four poster; in fact, the entire bedroom set was mahogany. The warm sunshine poured forth through the white muslin curtains, making the place more charming.

My attendant turned down the crocheted spread and bedclothes; set me down on the davenport and began to take off my shoes. Do you blame me for being disgusted? I was at the very point of declaring this funny work had gone far enough, when I remembered it was my own fault for having let it go on and possibly, if I waited long enough, I might get material for a story.

It was but a minute before I was in my pajamas again and securely tucked in the soft bed. Pulling low the white shades, my companion left the room.

How was this going to end? This was the question that clung to me and while wondering, I saw the door open and in the dim hall light I made out the figure of Marion coming toward the bed. Now what in the devil was I to do? Should I continue with the mummer face, or should I resume the attitude of a sane person? I was in the act of debating these thoughts in my mind when she knelt by the head of the bed and took my face in her little hands. Was this part of the comedy, or had my attendant shamed me without knowing the girl's intentions?

"Milner, my boy—my Milner." She was half whispering, half talking, in her low, musical voice. "Aren't you ever going to speak to me again?"

Her face was very close to mine and I could feel the warmth of her breath upon my cheek. Her eyes were large and brown and they looked at me with the tenderness of love. Suddenly her fingers tightened on my face and, raising my head from the pillow, I felt her soft lips touch mine.

"Good bye, Milner," she whispered. "You will be well again by night—all well again—good-bye." And she tiptoed from the room, closing the door behind her.

Had I done right in not telling her

I was not her lover? If I had, I really could not feel sorry for my silence. On my lips was the kiss of a girl I loved, but did not know.

It was not long before I heard the auto drive up the winding roadway and stop in front. I soon heard steps on the stairs and then my attendant entered. He pulled up the shades and the room was again filled with the golden light of day.

There was a rap on the door. He answered it and returned to the bed with the most delicious, dainty breakfast I had ever seen. I wondered if I would be allowed to feed myself or not, and was not long in finding out, for he tucked a napkin under my chin and raised a spoonful of sweetened grape fruit to my mouth. I disposed of it and it was only that I was nearly famished that I ate my breakfast in this way. When I had finished, he set the tray on the table and, going to a chest, produced a pair of white flannels, a white shirt, a pair of white socks and shoes, and a bright red blazer. Lifting back the covers, he helped me from the bed and dressed me in this new outfit.

Presently two men entered the room. They surveyed me so severely that I felt their presence added to the mystery. Both gave me piercing glances and then, with a nod from my companion, who was sitting in a rocker near the foot of the bed, took a seat on each side of me, continuing to gaze at my face.

"This is his condition all of the time," explained my companion. "He is helpless as a child. So if everything is ready so much the better."

The two strangers walked me between them down the stairs, out the door, and down the circling driveway to the golf links. I was then stationed facing the hill, a short distance from a stone wall about five feet high and two feet deep. On the hill sat a small audience of three,—an elderly lady and gentleman and Marion. A golf club was placed in my hands and it was not until then that I felt the first presentiment of fear, for in through the gate walked James with a revolver in each hand.

I didn't know whether I was ever going to have the pleasure of writing about this or not. From the looks of everything, I was about to die. There I stood with the golf club in my hands awaiting whatever might happen.

I saw the little audience on the hill lean forward, their faces wearing the most terrified expression. I also saw James raise the revolvers. Then I heard a snort some distance behind me and, turning, I faced, not fifty feet away, a mad bull, charging at me, with eyes glued to my red blazer.

Why in thunder didn't James shoot?

I realized I did not have time to dispense with my red coat so, with the sprinting ability I still retained from my track days, I made for the stone wall, which seemed my only way of escape. The bull was bearing down upon me. I heard his hoof beats right at my back. It seemed I could feel the heat of his breath. I heard the revolvers crack, and the whole mystery, together with the tragedy, faded into utter blackness.

When I opened my eyes, I was aware of a stinging pain in my left shoulder. I was being borne up the hill on a stretcher by two servants.

On each side walked one of the strangers.

"Well, of all the damn fool stunts," I gasped. "Did you kill the bull?"

"Be still!" said the man on my right.

"Sh—," cautioned the man on my left.

"Not a word," came a voice from the rear, which I recognized as that of my old friend and companion.

"You go to the devil," I cried, raising myself on my right elbow. "Where's Marion?"

All three took it upon themselves to inform me my sister would be with me in a little while, and that I must be quiet. So I was her brother. A feeling of relief came over me for the moment. I forgot the pain in my shoulder.

I had become so accustomed to being waited upon that I let my attendants put me to bed. From the conversation that followed, I learned they were physicians; the two strangers being Hicks and Marshall, Chicago specialists, and the third, my companion, a Doctor Smith from the city.

I confess the removing of the bullet was painful, but I gained confidence in them by watching the doctors' skilful methods in carrying out the operation.

"I guess we can let them come in now," said the doctor, when he had finished, and Doctor Hicks hastened to open the door.

A consultation of whispers was held outside and then the doctor entered accompanied by Mr. and Mrs. Van Court and Marion. Mr. Van Court came forward and I saw there were tears in his eyes.

"It's told on you, Milner—my boy. You've changed greatly."

On my part, I did not doubt his word in the least. "I feel much better," I managed to mumble. I imagined I appeared like an amateur actor who had forgotten his part.

"Oh—how thankful we are," wailed Mrs. Van Court, raising her handkerchief to her eyes. There was a knock at the door.

"A telegram for Mr. Van Court," called a servant.

Mr. Van Court went to the door and returned, reading the message:

Dear Dad:—Am in emergency hospital. Was struck by auto after wandering from Doctor Smith. The shock restored my memory, so I am told. Will be home soon.

MILNER.

Every face wore a blank expression and they gazed at me perplexed.

"An imposter!" cried Mr. Van Court, leaping to my bedside and shaking his fist in my face. "You scoundrel! you'll pay for this."

The three doctors rose to their feet and stood back amazed. Mrs. Van Court cried hysterically: "You wretch! You have deceived us. Oh, my son! my son!"

Marion walked over to the bedside and, looking down into my eyes, asked simply, "Who are you?"

"I am Robert Meredith," I replied.

I wanted to tell her all, but I knew the time had not yet come and I must wait.

"When you feel you have fully recovered," said Mr. Van Court, with somewhat of a sneer, "I'll see you downstairs."

They all left the room and I succeeded in dressing myself as best I

could with one hand, which was quite different from the former custom. When I was ready to present myself to the Van Courts, I didn't know whether I had better or not. After summoning up courage, I went down the stairs and seeing no one in the hall, I went out on the steps. On one of the stone ledges sat Marion with a magazine in her lap. She did not look up from her reading and as I glanced over her shoulder, I recognized the story as one of my own.

"Who is the author of that story?" I asked.

She started slightly, but looking at the name, answered smilingly, "Why —Robert Meredith. Are you the great author? Did you write this?"

"Yes—I wrote it. You will not be mistaken in believing I am Meredith."

"Then, Mr. Meredith," she continued curtly, "what were you doing here?"

I told her, beginning back at my first successes; of my failure and of the incident in the station that led up to this embarrassing situation.

"And now," I asked, seating myself beside her on the ledge, "will you help me by telling me some of the particulars concerning this mysterious escapade?"

Her light brown hair was carelessly piled and a few stray wisps waved in the noon breeze. The little hands that I had so closely encountered, smoothed the wrinkles out of her pale, blue gown, and she hesitatingly looked at me as if trying to think where to begin.

"This is the way it happened," she said. "Father, mother, Milner and myself, moved out here to this country home in the spring. Milner was on those golf links from morning until night. He never seemed to get enough of it. The day he was injured, he was standing just where you stood, and the bull, having broken down the fence, made for the red blazer. Milner ran for the wall the same as you did, saved himself from the bull easier than you would have done, but fell from the wall onto some stones on the other side, hitting his head on one of them.

"For days he laid in a dazed condition, and after the crisis had passed and we knew he was out of danger, we found his silence was due to a mental aberration. His mind proved to be blank and though he gained physically, his brain not only failed to recognize the old, familiar things, but was incapable of gasping any new learning.

"We sent him to hospitals in the city, but all operations failed. Two Chicago specialists claimed if he were put in the same place under similiar circumstances, there might be some chance of his recovery. As you probably now see, Doctor Smith was on his way out here when he fell asleep in the station. Hasn't this all been very strange? Does your shoulder pain you?"

"I had hardly noticed it," I replied. "But tell me, how did he come to shoot me?"

"James is indeed, a very good shot, Mr. Meredith. He shoots with both hands, but he became so excited that he hit you as well as the bull."

"Did he kill the bull?" I inquired.

"Yes, the first shot."

"Then I see I am greatly indebted to your father."

She paid no attention to my last remark but said, "Are you sure you are not, after all, a long lost brother of mine? You resemble Milner so much."

"I am afraid I am not so fortunate," I replied. "I have never seen your brother."

"But you will soon, if we do not receive word contary to the telegram."

"Marion!"

"Yes, mother;" and then to me, "Excuse me a minute, Mr. Meredith."

For some time I mused there alone on the stone ledge. My fingers were yearning for my pen. The story had come. How delightful it would be to express my thoughts on paper. I was roused from this meditation by Miss Van Court's voice.

"I have explained matters to my parents, Mr. Meredith. Won't you take lunch with us? They wish to offer apologies at once."

The lingering rays of the dying day faded away in the western sky. The robins were twittering their last sleepy chirps and the whippoorwill was beginning its evening song. We were seated beneath an old apple tree in the orchard, where we might carry out our work unmolested. Before us was a table on which were many papers, pens and ink.

"Marion—our story is nearly finished," I said. "We have it written up to the present time and there seems to be something lacking. What do you think it is?"

"It does lack something. Can't you tell me what it is?"

"Listen, dear, and I will tell you."

The robins ceased their chirping; the last rays of light had left the western sky, to make light another day; the whippoorwill still sang his mournful wail, and as long as this world goes round there will be told the same story that was told that night in the orchard.

Ugly-Honest

BY RUTH G. BOWMAN

NANCY slipped into the elevator as if it were her fairy coach. An hour ago she would have told herself that she was about to attend her own requiem mass, but an extra heavy dose of ammonia and an intoxicatingly-fresh bunch of violets pinned at her belt, had sent her spirits soaring. She swirled into the mayor's office with an effrontery not her own, which, spiced with a dash of apologetic prettiness, took her beside the mayor with the suddenness of a near collision.

"Well?" he laughed.

"Help wanted," she announced, making a placard of her hands.

"Sit down," he invited, "Miss ——?"

"Just Teacher," she returned. "You see, after you've been in the system as long as I have you sort of lose your identity, and you are just one in the big hopper with all the rest."

"You wish me to rescue you from the hopper?"

"No," she answered; "that's the wonder of it. I want you to help me to stay in. They're trying to throw me out and I'm holding on," she cried fiercely.

"Did you ever look over the top of it?" he parried; "it's pretty good on the outside."

"But I would feel all out of place being in a fresh, little world. You see, I am just a comfortable little molecule in there, and *They're* dragging me out, to hold me under the microscope. Then They'll call me a disease germ—some kind of an inflammable thing that causes trouble, and with that tag, They'll shove me over into the uncomfortable outside."

"I don't know," he remarked, with an amused twitch of the eyebrows, "but it seems to me you're already on the outside. I think I know your case. You're in the Plum Tree school?"

"Yes," she assented. "There's a little Kitteny-thing there too, and a principal!"

"And you took sides with the little Kitteny-thing," he rumbled angrily.

"Please don't bite," she pleaded mockingly. "I've been scratched and mauled enough. Bad luck for me," she continued, "I knew the facts in the case, and it was my cruel misfortune to be honestly reared."

"You did not have to be ugly-honest," he warned. "You could have done more with the dimple in your left cheek and the tilting of that other eyebrow than any number of thrusts from your brainy little head. There," he continued, watching the dimple deepen, "see the walls of Troy crumble!"

"But," stammered Nancy, "her brother had jumped to the wrong side. She had no one to help her, that's why the principal clawed her."

"And then her brother jumped the fence again and the Kitteny-thing clawed you."

"Yes," she panted; "and neither of them waited to give me a boost. I couldn't even see what they were doing on the other side."

"And now?"

"And now," she murmured, "it's up to you. What are you going to do?"

"The youngest mayor," the Irish mayor, Billie McGinn of Orchard City, sat admiring Nancy in open frankness.

"I'm going to talk to you as man to man," he admitted, "because I like you."

"Oh," fenced Nancy, feeling her heart, which she ever accused of being a milk-sop turning to whey,—"oh, go on," she finished meekly.

"If you will stay away from the school board meeting to-night, I can help you."

"But they have accused me," she blurted.

"Yes; and if you fail to show up their accusations will stand unquestioned. Be careful of the dimple," entreated "the youngest mayor." "You must always think of it when there is a crisis on."

Nancy was all-woman and at last the suggestion stuck,—charm was her subterfuge.

"And then?" she questioned.

"Your place, as has already been decided, will be given to the sister of the Kitteny-thing."

"Then?" she almost sobbed.

"After a while," he conceded, "I, the mayor, will take an interest in your case. I will say to the school board, 'This young woman has been wrong, but she will apologize. A vacancy will be ripe, and you will be reinstated.'"

"You mean," retorted Nancy, "that you will let them throw me out of the hopper, hurt, terribly hurt, and broken? Then 'after a while,' you, 'the youngest mayor,' will come and pick me up gently, wrap your furry-purry-political coat about me and lift me comfortably back into the hooper. Once again the public will applaud and worship their idol, the Irish mayor."

"Exactly," yielded the mayor. "A favor to you will mean another bouquet for me."

Nancy forgot her charm, forgot the game, forgot the machine. "You—you—" she cried, pointing a threatening finger, "I'll publish you in every paper. I'll—"

"I told you you were out of the hopper," he dared coolly. "You never lost your temper like that in the schoolroom. Sit down," he protested, taking firm hold of her wrists and wrenching them. "Do you feel that? Does it hurt?"

Nancy nodded as she bit back the pain.

"That isn't anything as tight as the machine and you're in it. You couldn't publish me. The machine owns the papers. The machine owns the people. The machine owns the mayor."

He dropped her wrists and tramped to the window. Presently the all-human mayor turned. "Do you think the dimple will ever show again?" he asked seriously, albeit there was a quizzical twitching about the curves of his stumpy nose.

Nancy had felt the inexorable cruelty of the machine and, as it twisted and bent her, the cunning of her kind had leaped to her aid. The dimples rollicked in her cheeks and her long

lashes signaled to the tilted brow as she rose. "I'm afraid," she sighed, "I'm ugly-honest sure enough. I must go tonight to defend myself. Maybe I am on the outside of the hopper, but I'm holding onto the edge and They'll have to chop my fingers off before I'll let go. Will you be there?" questioned she plaintively.

"No," he complained, "I will not. I'm Irish enough to hate bloodshed. If it were the wake now—"

Deftly Nancy unpinned the violets and let them slip to the floor.

The gallant Billie McGinn presented them with a sweeping bow.

"Don't trouble," breathed Nancy; "they're terribly faded now. They've been through fire." She held her breath for fear they would meet a worse fate in the waste basket.

Billie McGinn laid them on the corner of his desk as he shook her hand.

"Good-bye," she echoed. "Better come tonight, it will be a good fight."

Now that the vital contact was removed, she felt like a burnt out coal, gray and lifeless. Once again, she sat in her own little home, twisting and wreathing the plain facts in the hope of planning a cunning escape, yet at every turn the honest facts would block her scheming and she would find herself telling the whole truth in the simplest way. The breeze wafted her a breath of violets. In a moment, she was on her knees gathering great handfuls of the deep pulsing things. When she had finished, she sank into a hammock and slept the afternoon away.

"You folks stay away from my trial," Nancy told her friends. "Sympathy's a poor hypodermic for a stiff upper lip. And besides, you'll have time enough for all you have—afterwards."

So it was she entered the board room alone, knowing her portion, yet entirely unafraid. The afternoon nap had given her an unbelievable freshness, and the violets brought a tinge to her cheek and deepened the color of her eyes. Her dimples were out in full regalia. She beamed on the school board.

That was before the trial commenced. Afterward she lost count of her looks. She was there being tossed somewhere between the principal and the board members, and she could not catch her breath. She began tallying the questions by that old childish rhyme:

Fee—fie—foe—fum—
I smell the blood—

There the rhyme stuck, and there her case was practically disposed of in a twinkling.

Swaying a little, she rose to her feet when her testimony was demanded.

"Fee-fie-foe-fum—" the words that had ticked incessantly in her brain scampered from her lips. She stood dumfounded at her stupidity. Remembering "the youngest mayor's" advice, "take care of the dimple when a crises is on," she switched them on in a flash. She must at least save her reputation as a sane woman. She began again:

"Fee—fie—foe—fum—
I smell the blood of a teacher Mu'um
Be she living or be she dead,
I'll grind her bones to make my bread."

A roar of laughter burst with her last word.

"Yes," laughed Nancy, "I'm about to be put into the meat chopper,—but before I go I am determined to be stamped as the pure-unadulterated-perfectly-reliable-honest kind." Briskly, yet with a touch of humor, she sketched her case in all its ugly-honest bareness. "Fee-fie-foe-fum," she finished, "now for the teacher's martyrdom."

She remained standing to receive her sentence. She was so intent on holding the dimple, that she pressed it with her first finger to make sure of it. Irreverently a man laughed and she stood face to face with Billie McGinn.

The board whispered and argued. One member shook his head negatively. Another brought down his fist in the affirmative, yet another smiled as he pointed to Nancy. Powerless to bring them to the foreordained sentence, the president produced a closely written note and passed it around the table. It was an order from the mayor!

They sat back grimly in their chairs. The president stood. Nancy was in the grip of the machine and it was demanding every drop of her life blood. How cruelly it hurt! No, the dimples would never show again; her finger felt them changing to long, deep scars. Unconsciously she loosed the voilets from her belt. They were too heavy for her to bear. Someone darted forward and took them. She felt the vital presence of "the youngest mayor" beside her.

"Miss Gilman," the president read, "has been found—"

"Stop," cried the mayor, in a good, old-fashioned Irish rage, "a question there." His rage pointed to the purry-kitteny-thing.

"Kid," whispered her brother, "answer him straight. This is his grandstand play to swing to the reform ticket. I knew I was right. I knew he would do it."

The little purry-kitteny-thing, without a blush, related the unfortunate affair with a spit and soft-pawed-scratch for the principal, denying everything she had said before. She had never forgiven the principal and was delighted to let her feel her pretty claws.

The Irish mayor kept his eyes on Nancy. Fitfully the dimples would come and go in half-fearful anxiety lest she were wandering into "fie-foe-" land again. When the kitteny-thing had finished he turned to the board:

"Now, Mr. President," he pronounced, "we are ready for the verdict."

"Miss Gilman," read the president, coloring, "has been found—not guilty."

And then, as always, "the youngest mayor" received an ovation. In the confusion that followed, Billie McGinn crossed to the table. He wrote a slip of paper rapidly. He called Nancy to him. "Sign it," he said simply. The import of it appalled her. It was her resignation as a teacher.

"I will not," she determined, looking at him squarely.

"I have other work I want you to do," he whispered gently.

"But I wish to get back into the hopper," she complained. "Look how comfy they are over there," she averred, pointing to a group of her teacher friends who had come, against her wishes.

"The violets you left worked over-

VOLUME TIGHTLY BOUND

time," he yielded. "They brought me here. You know their message."

Nancy gave one glance at the flushed, honest face beside her. Her eyes dropped. With a trembling hand she signed away her liberty.

"Look here, Billie McGinn," urged the president; "what's your game?"

"That's one resignation," stated the mayor solemnly. "Tomorrow, mine will go to the council. If I stayed in, after this, I'd have to fight you boys, the bosses, and all the other fellows that I've worked with for years,—the fellows that have been good to me. I'm going to leave you a clean campus and attend strictly to my business. It's needed me badly lately."

The president grasped his hand, and with one impulse they both turned to the girl, who stood at the table's end with downcast eyes.

"That's it," acknowledged Billie.

"Damn the girl," stammered the president under his breath.

"Look out for Billie McGinn, Jr.," flared "the youngest mayor"—"when he's twenty-one, if the machine is still doing its dirty work, he'll smash it into bits with a reform ticket."

Then, fearing that Nancy had overheard his boast of the unborn future, he hurried her away.

"Oh, Billie," she murmured affectionately, "Billie McGinn, sure and by faith, you're ugly-honest, too."

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